



# 夫君您看

FUJUN

YOUZHEDIAN

一个会看夫君，一个会看您。  
一个女人会看夫君，一个女人会看您。

苏少卿◎著





lang="en">

# Husband, Be a Gentleman

## Table of Contents

- 1. [Introduction](#)
- 2. [One](#)
- 3. [part 1](#)
- 4. [part 2](#)
- 5. [part 1](#)
- 6. [part 2](#)
- 7. [Four](#)
- 8. [part 1](#)
- 9. [part 2](#)
- 10. [Six](#)
- 11. [Seven](#)
- 12. [Eight](#)
- 13. [part 1](#)
- 14. [part 2](#)
- 15. [Ten](#)
- 16. [Eleven](#)
- 17. [part 1](#)
- 18. [part 2](#)
- 19. [Thirteen](#)
- 20. [Fourteen](#)
- 21. [part 1](#)
- 22. [part 2](#)
- 23. [part 3](#)
- 24. [part 1](#)
- 25. [part 2](#)
- 26. [part 1](#)



27. [part 2](#)
28. [part 1](#)
29. [part 2](#)
30. [Nineteen](#)
31. [part 1](#)
32. [part 2](#)
33. [Twenty-One](#)
34. [part 1](#)
35. [part 2](#)
36. [part 1](#)
37. [part 2](#)
38. [Twenty-Four](#)
39. [part 1](#)
40. [part 2](#)
41. [Twenty-Six](#)
42. [Twenty-Seven](#)
43. [Twenty-Eight](#)
44. [Twenty-Nine](#)
45. [Thirty](#)
46. [Thirty-One](#)
47. [Thirty-Two](#)
48. [Thirty-Three](#)
49. [Thirty-Four](#)
50. [Thirty-Five](#)
51. [part 1](#)
52. [part 2](#)
53. [Thirty-Seven](#)
54. [part 1](#)
55. [part 2](#)
56. [part 1](#)
57. [part 2](#)
58. [part 1](#)
59. [part 2](#)
60. [Forty-One](#)

61. [Forty-Two](#)
62. [Forty-Three](#)
63. [Forty-Four](#)
64. [Forty-Five](#)
65. [Forty-Six](#)
66. [Forty-Seven](#)
67. [Forty-Eight](#)
68. [Forty-Nine](#)
69. [Fifty](#)
70. [Fifty-One](#)
71. [Fifty-Two](#)
72. [Fifty-Three](#)
73. [part 1](#)
74. [part 2](#)
75. [Fifty-Five](#)
76. [Fifty-Six](#)
77. [Fifty-Seven](#)
78. [Fifty-Eight](#)
79. [Fifty-Nine](#)
80. [Sixty](#)
81. [Sixty-One](#)
82. [Sixty-Two](#)
83. [Sixty-Three](#)
84. [Sixty-Four](#)
85. [Sixty-Five](#)
86. [Sixty-Six](#)
87. [Sixty-Seven](#)
88. [Sixty-Eight](#)
89. [Sixty-Nine](#)
90. [Seventy](#)
91. [Seventy-One](#)
92. [Seventy-Two](#)
93. [Seventy-Three](#)
94. [Seventy-Four](#)

- 95. [Seventy-Five](#)
- 96. [Seventy-Six](#)
- 97. [Seventy-Seven](#)
- 98. [Seventy-Eight](#)
- 99. [Seventy-Nine](#)
- 00. [Eighty](#)
- 01. [Eighty-One](#)
- 02. [Side Story One](#)

# Introduction

Husband, Be A Gentleman (夫君，悠着点) by Su Xing Yue (苏行乐) Ancient C-  
Novel: HE, 81 Chapters + 1 Side Story Male Lead: Pei Jin



A prince raised by the empress after his mother died mysteriously. He is not favored by the emperor. He grows up evading assassination attempts more times than a cat's nine lives. He is handsome and intelligent. His secret weakness is Yan Shi Ning.

Female Lead: Yan Shi Ning



On the inside she is a mischievous tomboy but on the outside she is an elegant young lady. Her father abandoned her and her mother to be a princess' consort and become a court official. She lives with her father, step-mother and their daughter after her mother died mysteriously. She is beautiful and intelligent but she camouflages her true self to survive the hidden cruelty in her father's home.

#### Synopsis:

Pei Jin is a black bellied prince. To outsiders he is a kind gentleman and always calm.

Yan Shi Ning is a wolf in sheep's clothing. To outsiders she is a gentle bred young lady and always docile.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning are the perfect couple but behind closed doors...

Pei Jin: Wife, you're an expert liar.

Yan Shi Ning: Husband, it's because you taught me well.

#### ***Related***

# One



## Chapter One

Yan Shi Ning's peach blossom tree in life was pitiful.

She lived past eighteen years and had yet to see her peach blossom tree blossomed even once.

She wasn't a bad match, she was sane and beautiful. But she didn't know why she didn't even have one suitor. It was an insane situation.

Her father was the prime minister, Yan Jing. It was a pity she wasn't her father's golden daughter.

Yan Jing was a poor scholar, he struggled to study for ten years. During that trialling period, Yan Shi Ning's mother Dung Thi supported him. Yan Jing and Dung Thi had a loving relationship. Unexpectedly after he entered the palace to take the imperial examination, he caught Princess Kang Hua's attention.

Yan Jing faced a difficult dilemma. On one side he loved Dung Thi and on the other side was his high ambition. His final decision was he wanted both and



married Princess Kang Hua.

He thought he would live an ideal life. But on his wedding night with Princess Kang Hua, Dung Thi packed her belongings and returned to her family's country home. Dung Thi never returned to the imperial city even though she gave birth to Yan Shi Ning in the country.

After Yan Shi Ning's birth, half of Yan Jing's heart was in the imperial city and the other half was with Dung Thi. Occasionally he visited his parents and Dung Thi in the country. He missed Dung Thi and wanted to visit more often but Princess Kang Hua was a powerful force and didn't allow him to visit them often.

More than ten years past by quickly. Dung Thi worked hard to earn a living and died of pneumonia. When Yan Jing found out Dung Thi died, he cried continuously. Then he brought Yan Shi Ning to the imperial city. That year Yan Shi Ning was only sixteen years old.

Usually young ladies at the age of sixteen were the target of many matchmakers. But Yan Shi Ning's family background wasn't ideal. Even though she was the prime minister's daughter, she didn't have high hopes for an ideal husband. Prominent men wanted to marry someone who was most compatible with them to elevate their status. In the prime minister's manor behind Yan Shi Ning was his golden daughter. The golden daughter's mother was a princess and the princess was also the empress' blood sister.

Compared to Princess Kang Hua's daughter, Yan Shi Ning didn't have any powerful family connections and Yan Shi Ning was alone in the world. It was the main reason why many court officials didn't want to marry Yan Shi Ning. Their eyes focused solely on the prime minister's golden daughter.

For two years Yan Shi Ning stayed in an endless restless state in the imperial city. No suitors wanted to marry her. When she was free she thought about the two consequences of not having suitors. One, soon she would past the desirable marriage age to start a family then it was logical that the ground below was forced to look at what was above. Second, her father stood behind Princess Kang Hua to support the princess, and Yan Shi Ning's marriage state wasn't an exception.

Although Yan Shi Nang aged as each day past, she didn't care if she became an

old maid. When other people pitied her, she smiled and silently maintained her gentle and docile image.

She remembered what her mother instructed her before dying, ‘the imperial city isn’t like Xuan Qing. After you leave Xuan Qing, you can’t follow your impulses. Princess Kang Hua isn’t someone you should offend. If you offend her, she’ll take revenge. You need to be careful of your words and actions.’

Since Yan Shi Ning lived in the imperial city, she listened to her mother’s warning and controlled her words and actions. She quickly became well known in the imperial city for being gentle and docile.

At the beginning she wasn’t used to suppressing her impulses. The heavens knew she was someone who had a quick temper and restless. It was hard for her to be a well behaved young lady who never showed her teeth while laughing. Luckily the more she acted gentle and docile, it gradually became a habit.

Within two years living in the imperial city when people were free and talked about the prime minister’s oldest daughter they would associate Yan Shi Ning with gentle and docile. Of course afterward they would say that it was a pity someone so gentle and docile couldn’t be married off.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t feel it was a pity. The heavens knew she didn’t care about being unwed and that she had already prepared to live an independent old maid’s life.

But quickly it became clear that as she aged, someone else would see her marriage state as an obstacle in their path. She waved her fan, looked at the sky and inwardly realised it was possible for a person to be an obstacle in relation to marriage.

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End of Chapter One

***Related***



## part 1



### Chapter Two (Part 1)

Yan Shi Ning sat silently opposite her father in the courtyard.

Yan Jing contemplated for a while about how much he owed his oldest daughter and felt guilty discussing his youngest daughter's marriage plight.

'Shi Ning, the crown prince wants to marry Shi Ting,' Yan Jing said. 'The latest the wedding can be postpone is at the start of next year.'

Yan Shi Ning lowered her head and laughed inwardly. She knew her father's motive for telling her about Yan Shi Ting's good news wasn't so that she could say to Yan Shi Ting, 'little sister, congratulations.'

What her father wanted to say was, 'your little sister wants to get married, you should think about your little sister's situation and prepare yourself mentally to quickly find a husband so that you won't interfere with your little sister's auspicious wedding day.'

The culprit behind her father coercing her to find a husband was clearly Princess Kang Hua's powerful influence.

‘It isn’t right for Shi Ting to be married before her older sister,’ Yan Jing said.

Yan Jing sighed endlessly and felt incredibly guilty.

Yan Shi Ning appeared to look guiltier than her father. ‘Father, it’s my fault for causing you to worry.’

Yan Shi Ning thought it was pointless for her father to start feeling guilty. But every time the usual guilty expression was visible on her father’s face, she loved to respond to it by appearing more humble and apologetic to make his conscience eat up his stomach.

Yan Jing saw the way his oldest daughter was incredibly humble and understanding, it made it hard for him to face his oldest daughter.

‘Shi Ning, do you have someone you admire?’ Yan Jing asked. ‘If you tell me who it is, I’ll act accordingly as your father.’

The corner of Yan Shi Ning’s mouth curved upward slightly and she spoke in the gentlest tone. ‘I have no one in my heart. I leave it up to father to make arrangements for me.’

On the surface she sounded like a filial daughter. But in her heart she didn’t believe her father regarded her highly or that his main intention was to find her a good husband.

She didn’t want to waste time opposing her father. It was better for her to act submissive and filial. What alternative did she have? Go find the crown prince and tell him her grievances that her father didn’t care about her marriage state? She was a realistic person and knew the outcome would be the same, she would be forced to be married off to a man who supposedly was ‘intelligent and strong.’

She wondered about the unlucky ‘intelligent and strong’ man who would be ‘persuaded’ to be her husband.

‘Tomorrow there’ll be a banquet at the palace in honor of the crown prince,’ Yan Jing said. ‘Shi Ning, you’ll be attending the banquet too. If you meet anyone that you like, tell me... Shi Ning, don’t worry, I won’t let Kang Hua and Shi Ting find you an unsuitable man to marry you off. If you don’t approve of any of the men you meet then I won’t approve of them either.’

Yan Jing looked at his oldest daughter lowering her head for a while and he didn't want to put more pressure on her. He silently left the courtyard in a state of worries.

She raised her head after her father left the courtyard and she smiled mockingly. If she met a man at the banquet who was high in the sky, she doubted her father was capable of putting his pride aside and beg the emperor to command the prominent man to marry her.

Her father valued pride too much to lower himself. It was laughable that he thought he could make everything flow smoothly by voicing a promise he couldn't keep. To an outsider his empty promise would deeply move them. But her father broke too many promises in the past. Why did he think that she could still believe his words were true?

Especially that year he promised her mother, 'in this life I only need you.'

Yet her father chose ambition, status and riches and betrayed her mother by marrying another woman.

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End of Chapter Two (Part 1)

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## part 2



### Chapter Two (Part 2 of 2)

Early the following morning, Yan Shin Ning was brushing her hair when her chamber door opened.

Immediately a strong sweet perfume filled her chamber. She didn't need to turn around to know it was her little sister Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Shi Ting was sixteen years old, two years younger than her. Put aside her bias, she thought her little sister was a rare beauty.

Yan Shi Ting's skin was white and delicately fragile, tiny waist, long slender legs and looked beautiful wearing any dress. Also, Yan Shi Ting was someone who knew how to wear makeup which enhanced Yan Shi Ting's naturally beautiful face.

The first time she met Yan Shi Ting, she thought Yan Shi Ting was the epitome of beauty in the kingdom and she had predicted Yan Shi Ting's fate correctly.

Yan Shi Ning predicted Yan Shi Ting's beauty couldn't be appreciated intimately by the emperor who was at an advanced age but Yan Shi Ting's beauty was reserved for the crown prince.

The crown prince marrying the prime minister's golden daughter secured the crown prince's future and their marriage benefited both their families. The only obstacle in their marriage was the golden daughter's older sister, herself. She smiled grudgingly while the golden daughter walked toward her.

'Big sister can you dress quicker?' Yan Shi Ting asked impatiently. 'I waited for big sister for half a day!'

Yan Shi Ning turned her head around and saw Yan Shi Ting frowning, chin raised and wore an expensive and elegant dress.

'Little sister, it's been hard on you,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ting pouted and looked condescending at Yan Shi Ning. The heavens knew how much she wished her big sister didn't exist to delay her becoming the crown prince's consort.

Yan Shi Ting wore a bright red silk dress. She didn't hesitate to pick up the hideous and cheap blue cotton dress.

'Big sister are you wearing this ugly to death dress?' Yan Shi Ting asked. 'Aren't you scared you'll be embarrassed?' She grabbed the dress her maid held and passed it to Yan Shi Ning. 'Big sister, wear this, it's new. I haven't worn it before.'

Yan Shi Ning accepted the dress and forced a smile. 'Thank you little sister.'

Yan Shi Ting sneered and left Yan Shi Ning's chamber. If Yan Shi Ting didn't want at least one man to be attracted to her at the banquet then Yan Shi Ting would never give such an expensive and beautiful dress to her.

Yan Shi Ning attended many banquets in the palace, the banquets were always the same. The elders would congregate in the palace banquet hall and the younger generation would use it as an opportunity to be entertained by musicians and dancers while exchanging secret loving glances with the person of their heart.

After the banquet ended the elders disappeared and the younger generation entertained themselves in the palace gardens. The younger generation would meet up in pairs in remote areas of the palace gardens to be intimate, it was a common pastime.

Yan Shi Ning was sheltered by the roof of the pavilion from the glaring sunlight. She sat waving her fan and smiled slyly. The heavens knew that her favorite time during palace visits was when the 'gentle' young men and ladies amused her with their unsubtle affectionate displays.

'Big sister, don't sit here in that state!' Yan Shi Ting scolded scornfully. 'If you see a man that you're attracted to then quickly go to him. I hate big sister's feigned innocence the most!'

Yan Shi Ning's head suddenly ached and she sighed, her haughty little sister always love to scold others.

Yan Shi Ting was about to lecture Yan Shi Ning more when she saw someone familiar walked past them.

'Big sister, don't forget the purpose of you being here today,' Yan Shi Ting warned and hurriedly followed the familiar person.

Yan Shi Ning smiled slyly, another young pair was going to meet somewhere remote in the palace gardens.

Yan Shi Ning wasn't foolish enough to believe that her peach blossom tree that had been dead for eighteen years would suddenly bloom. All she needed to do was see the way the people in the palace gardens looked down on her existence to know the truth.

Everyone who attended the banquet at the palace knew of her situation, which was why they didn't waste their time with her.

To maintain her elegant and docile image she wouldn't approach a man first.

After her little sister left the pavilion, she pulled out a wine gourd and slowly drank comfortably and happily. Suddenly she saw a familiar man within a close distance and her happy smile disappeared.

'MF!' she cursed softly. 'Mouthy boy!'

She hurriedly stood and escaped the pavilion. The further she was away from mouthy boy the better otherwise three years of wood collection would be burned within a shichen hour.

'But mouthy boy was supposed to be in Southern Jiang, why did he suddenly

return?' she mumbled softly.

Pei Jin saw a familiar figure fled and hesitated for a bit before following suit.

Yan Shi Ning strode past the path of willow trees while looking out in all directions for signs of anyone. Even in her paranoid state she couldn't neglect her gentle and docile image.

She stopped in front a fake rock mountain and realised she didn't know how long she walked for. She thought no one could see her in such a secluded area and sat down to think about why mouthy boy returned to the imperial city. While she was thinking she heard moans and groans from behind the fake rock mountain.

'Ah... ah... can you be gentler?' a young lady asked in a familiar voice.

'I missed you to death,' a young man said in a familiar voice.

'You... ah... don't stain this dress,' the young lady said.

She tilted her head, peered through a hole in the fake rock mountain and her face turned red. A young man's hand propped against the mountain and his other hand held onto the young lady's waist. When the young lady turned around to kiss the man, she was shocked. The young lady was her little sister, Yan Shi Ting and the young man was the crown prince.

She took a deep breath and smiled slyly. She understood why her little sister was always confident the crown prince was within control of her little sister's hand.

She hurriedly left, her eyes were looking at the clear sky and waved her fan.

'It'll be a shame to spoil such a beautiful life by accidentally eavesdropping,' she mumbled softly.

She didn't look where she was walking and bumped into someone. She raised her head and saw a familiar face smiling smugly. She had wanted to open her mouth, but Pei Jin quickly covered her mouth and dragged her to another part of the palace gardens.

'Big brother, let go of me!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning's angry face and smiled. 'In the past I said the



young mistress of the Yan household couldn't possibly be a gentle and docile young lady. In my memories, she is a little lion with sharp teeth and claws. Wait, she isn't a little lion anymore, she's now an old lion.'

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin's mocking face and suppressed her desire to attack him.

'But I didn't expect you to secretly enjoy eavesdropping and spying on a couple's intimate moment,' Pei Jin teased and laughed as long as a summer's breeze.

The faraway look in Yan Shi Ning's eyes remembered that year Pei Jin used her as his amusement. She suppressed her anger and feigned a smile. 'Ninth prince is right.'

Pei Jin was the emperor's ninth son. He was twenty-four years old and was well known for his gentleness and kindness, which was why people called him ninth gentle prince.

But Yan Shi Ning knew clearly 'gentleness and kindness' didn't have any relation to mouthy boy. They were only used as his mask. Underneath the mask he was a scoundrel and undisputedly the best liar in the kingdom.

After the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting ended their secret meeting, the crown prince left the fake rock mountain first to avoid suspicions. The crown prince saw one of his brothers and a young lady nearby and his heart panicked.

'Little brother, why are you here?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning saw how quickly Pei Jin wore his mask and internally cursed the expert liar.

The crown prince thought his older brother and the young lady didn't discover what happened and sighed softly. 'Uh, I came here from the palace's Rui Qing. Why are big brother here with a young lady?'

'I want to go to Rui Qing,' Pei Jin lied and glanced at Yan Shi Ning. 'Coincidentally I bumped into Lady Yan who also wants to go to Rui Qing. We've been talking on our way to Rui Qing. Lady Yan is indeed beautiful and witty.'

Yan Shi Ning felt like her intestines were pulled out of her body but she smiled.



‘Ninth prince is the one who is handsome and wittier than an ordinary person.’

Inwardly she cursed Pei Jing, ‘heavens, will he die without his deceitful mask?’

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End of Chapter Two (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

## part 1



### Chapter Three (Part 1)

Yan Shi Ning fled from Pei Jin the moment the crown prince left.

Pei Jin stared at the back of Yan Shi Ning's figure for a while and reminisced about the past.

'Little brother, what are you thinking about?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Seventh brother, I'm admiring the palace gardens,' Pei Jin said. 'It looks like a heavenly landscape.'

'Looks like a mortal landscape,' Pei Zhang said.

Pei Jin didn't refute his seventh brother.

Pei Zhang glanced at Yan Shi Ning's back. 'Little brother, do you know about our little brother and the younger Lady Yan?'

'I recently returned from Southern Jiang,' Pei Jin said. 'Seventh brother, what has been happening in the imperial city while I was away?'

'Little brother, you'll be drinking celebratory wine at their wedding early next

year,' Pei Zhang said.

'Truly?' Pei Jin asked. 'What good news.'

Pei Jin's smiling face made Pei Zhang's eyes itched.

'Good news indeed for the crown prince,' Pei Zhang said. 'With Yan Jing's support, the crown prince can sleep higher and more carefree.'

'Prime Minister Yan is reputed to be a resourceful and diligent court official, who he supports will certainly become more influential,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Zhang's eyes darkened from the sounds of Pei Jin's words that didn't reveal one drop of water. Pei Zhang's desire to seize the crown prince position was well known. He had always wanted his ninth brother's support. But two years ago when he subtly asked ninth brother to help him, ninth brother volunteered to go to Southern Jiang to subdue rebels. The moment ninth brother left, he knew that ninth brother had no intentions to join in the battle to contest the throne.

Pei Zhang watched Yan Shi Ning play with young children nearby for a while. 'If Yan Shi Ting wants to marry then Yan Shi Ning needs to find a husband. It's been a contentious problem for the Yan household.'

Pei Jin's intuition told him that seventh brother had bad intentions toward Yan Shi Ning.

'Truly?' Pei Jin asked. 'I have met the older Lady Yan. I enjoy talking with her. Seventh brother, what do you think about me marrying her?'

If Pei Jin's intuition was right then his cold hearted seventh brother wanted to marry Yan Shi Ning. Pei Jin wouldn't allow that to happen, seventh brother married many wives to gain power in the imperial court.

Pei Zhang knew ninth brother understood him well. If the crown prince marries the younger Lady Yan then Yan Jing would be an obstacle for Pei Zhang to become crown prince. He had intended to marry the older Lady Yan, but he didn't expect ninth brother would voice an intention to marry Yan Shi Ning first.

Pei Zhang frowned at the sight of Pei Jin's shiny eyes and Pei Jin's careful words. Pei Zhang didn't know if Pei Jin truly wanted to marry Yan Shi Ning or if Pei Jin wanted to oppose him.

‘She is known for being gentle and docile, she’ll be compatible with ninth brother,’ Pei Zhang said.

Pei Zhang knew it wasn’t worth fighting with ninth brother for a woman, it was beneficial for him to concede Yan Shi Ning to ninth brother.

‘But ninth brother, you’ll owe me one favour,’ Pei Zhang said, brushed the sleeves of his outer robe and left.

Behind Pei Zhang’s back, Pei Jin was smiling. Pei Jin turned his head and stared at Yan Shi Ning who was playing with children.

‘Little lion, I’ve helped you avoid a catastrophe, how will you thank me?’ Pei Jin asked softly.

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End of Chapter Three (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Three (Part 2 of 2)

That afternoon Pei Jin discussed his intentions to marry Yan Shi Ning with the emperor.

The emperor was always indifferent toward his ninth son. He thought Pei Jin's request wasn't unreasonable and gave his consent.

Early the next morning Pei Jin visited the Yan Manor to ask for Yan Jing's blessing for him to marry Yan Shi Ning.

Only a day ago Yan Jing returned to Yan Manor shaking his head in a worrisome way, his oldest daughter's plan to find a husband at the banquet failed.

Yan Jing was happily surprised to have ninth gentle prince visit the Yan Manor and ask to marry his oldest daughter. Yan Jing knew his oldest daughter must be married off, but he never expected she would have a husband from high in the

sky.

Yan Jing's ears were sweetened by ninth gentle prince's praises and admiration confession toward his oldest daughter.

Princess Kang Hua thought ninth gentle prince had mistaken Yan Shi Ning for Yan Shi Ting.

In contrast after Yan Shi Ning heard mouthy boy's proposal, she spat out tea from her mouth.

Yan Shi Ning widened her eyes and looked in disbelief at her father who sat opposite her in the courtyard.

'Shi Ning, ninth gentle prince has a weak status in the imperial court but he is still a prince,' Yan Jing said. 'I've assessed him for many years, he is a good man. Unlike his brothers, he doesn't want the throne. If you marry him then you'll live a peaceful life.'

Yan Jing sighed. He didn't want to be involved in the princes' battle for the throne. But his association with Princess Kang Hua forced him to be involved. He knew there were two consequences for supporting a prince for a throne, either staying alive if the prince he supported became emperor or killed if lost the throne. Although the crown prince was powerful, he couldn't underestimate seventh prince's power in the imperial court either.

Yan Jing was overjoyed to let his oldest daughter marry ninth gentle prince. Whether the crown prince or seventh prince became emperor, his oldest daughter would be alive and safe.

Yan Shi Ning suppressed her fear and composed herself. She heard her father's words and understood his intention. But she didn't say anything. She lowered her head and assessed the situation in her heart. She heard rumors of seventh prince and the crown prince battling for the throne. The emperor had fifteen sons and three daughters. But only four of his sons and one of his daughters were alive, the others were dead.

The four princes included seventh prince, Pei Zhang. Pei Zhang's birth mother was Consort Mu. Ninth prince, Pei Jin and his birth mother was a palace maid. Tenth prince, Pei Lam was the crown prince. Pei Lam's birth mother was the

empress. Thirteenth prince, Pei Khan was three years old and his mother was an unfavored consort.

It was known that Pei Jin had no intention to become emperor and he wanted to be a carefree prince. While Pei Zhang had a black heart. Pei Zhang's relatives on his mother's side were as powerful as the empress' family and his desire to be emperor was infamous.

In the last few years, Pei Zhang and Pei Lam's support from court officials were split.

Of course Princess Kang Hua supported the empress' son and wanted Yan Shi Ting to marry Pei Lam.

'Six years ago, ninth gentle prince had a betrothal with a court official's daughter,' Yan Jing said. 'But the court official's daughter died before the wedding. He was heartbroken and he remained loyal to her even after her death.'

Yan Jing's regret of betraying Dung Thi was reflected on his face.

Yan Shi Ning's mouth tightened. What heartbroken? What loyalty? Six years ago mouthy boy visited her in Xuan Qing. In front of everyone else, mouthy boy acted heartbroken. Behind their backs, he loved to bully and threaten her! Thoughts about the past pained her heart.

'Ninth gentle prince is handsome too,' Yan Jing said. 'I'm certain you will not suffer if you marry him... Shi Ning, what do you think?'

Yan Shi Ning's heart protested. What no suffering? Mouthy boy would bully her until death. She raised her head and glanced at her father. Her heart laughed coldly. Her father talked for half a day yet he pointlessly asked for her opinion when his decision was made immediately after mouthy boy's proposal.

Yan Shi Ning nodded and spoke in the gentlest tone. 'Father, you can make the arrangements.'

Even though she disliked mouthy boy, she understood his higher status didn't allow her to refuse his proposal.

Yan Shi Ning didn't want to admit that she couldn't find a more carefree life

than marrying Pei Jin. She would have status, didn't have to worry about him fighting to be emperor and most importantly she would fulfil her mother's final request, 'I want you to be fed, clothed and live a peaceful life.'

Yan Shi Ning accepting Pei Jin's proposal was her best choice. She predicted that in the future she would be married to the most cunning, thick face and expert liar. It was a prediction scarier than death.

Yan Jing gave his blessing for Pei Jin to marry Yan Shi Ning.

In the palace the emperor presented to Pei Jin two auspicious days for Pei Jin's wedding. The first day was at the start of the eighth month and the second day was in three months.

'The start of the eighth month is a good day,' Pei Jin said. 'If the wedding is in three months it'll be too close to the New Year and will detract from little brother's wedding. Also, the rebels in the south are unpredictable. It's better for imperial father to prepare a simple wedding for me.'

The emperor was pleased to hear Pei Jin understood the situation well and immediately consented to prepare Pei Jin's wedding for the start of the eighth month. The emperor didn't have a deep bond with Pei Jin, but he thought Pei Jin was a reasonable person.

The moment Pei Jin was not within sight of his father, he smiled sadistically. Pei Jin chose the earliest auspicious wedding day, because he couldn't wait to tease and torment the little lion.

After the wedding gifts were prepared, wedding garments were sewed and invitations were delivered, it was the fifth day of the eighth month which was the day before Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's wedding day.

That hot night Yan Shi Ning couldn't cope with the humidity. She laid on her bed wearing a loose inner robe. She thought it was surreal that she was marrying mouthy boy the following day. But she didn't doubt mouthy boy was anticipating their wedding day.

Mouthy boy's scoundrel face appeared in her head. She didn't know why there were many women mouthy boy could marry, but he purposely wanted to provoke her. Since their first meeting when she was six years old, each time they



met was never a good experience.

Yan Shi Ning felt within the last twelve years that she was a pitiful mouse caught by the cunning cat Pei Jin. Pei Jin didn't swallow her whole. He preferred to claw her slowly, tease her and frustrate her to death.

Luckily she wasn't her naive self from twelve years ago.

Suddenly she felt there was something suspicious. She knew Pei Jin's real personality too well. It was unlike him to let her live peacefully. Their wedding day was set but it was suspicious he didn't come to see her privately to cause her grief within the last month. Apart from the day he made an appearance at the Yan Manor to give wedding gifts, he didn't even deliver one message to provoke her.

She didn't know what mouthy boy was scheming. Suddenly she heard a faint noise from the window. She turned her head toward the window and saw someone climbed through the window.

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End of Chapter Three (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Four



## Chapter Four

Yan Shi Ning couldn't see the intruder clearly in the dark chamber.

She panicked. A thief? A bandit? Too many scary thoughts appeared in her head. She quickly grabbed the pillow and threw it at the intruder.

The pillow hit the intruder's head, followed by a thud. The intruder fell on the ground.

When Yan Shi Ning arrived at the Yan Manor, she knew she couldn't live harmoniously with Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting. She purposely chose the chamber furthest from the mother and daughter pair. But the chamber was upstairs. She rushed to the window to see if the intruder died.

Outside below the chamber the intruder stood but didn't leave. The intruder whispered something incoherent.

'Mistress, are you alright?' a maid asked from outside the chamber door.

Yan Shi Ning finally heard what the intruder whispered, 'little lion, it's me.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't know what to do. Heavens! Mouthy boy indeed couldn't let her live peacefully.

Her first thought was to scream 'thief.' Afterward the guards in the Yan Manor would capture mouthy boy and see his true mask. What gentleness? What kindness? Mouthy boy was actually a bandit that climbed through a maiden's window in the middle of the night.

'I'm alright,' Yan Shi Ning said reluctantly to the maid. 'I was getting a cup of water, you can go back to sleep.'

Her second thought was that it would be pointless for mouthy boy to be caught. He would explain the situation to appear like the perfect gentleman, 'tomorrow is my wedding day, my heart was restless and I wanted to see my betrothed. I know sneaking into her chamber is wrong, but I couldn't control how much I missed her. Prime Minister Yan, please forgive me this one time.'

If her prediction became true then mouthy boy's mask wouldn't be taken off, but help enhance his reputation and make him appear like a man deeply in love with his betrothed. The more she thought about his cunningness the more she wanted to attack him.

She peered outside the window and saw Pei Jin began to climb the wall into her chamber again. His movements were too swift like he often climbed into a maiden's chamber.

Half of Pei Jin's body entered through the window. She quickly closed half the window to stop him from entering the chamber.

'Big brother, you're here?' Yan Shi Ning asked softly.

Pei Jin used one hand to keep the window open and his other hand passed Yan Shi Ning the pillow.

'Tomorrow is our wedding day,' Pei Jin said in a tone too sweet. 'My heart

missed you. I rolled on my bed many times and couldn't sleep. I wanted to see you.'

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin.

'But you shouldn't reward me with a pillow,' Pei Jin protested. 'Look at my forehead, it's swollen. What am I going to do tomorrow?'

'You deserve it,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Big brother, you should be happy it's a wooden pillow. If it's a jade pillow then you wouldn't have a small lump on your forehead.'

Pei Jin frowned, Yan Shi Ning continued to hold the window to stop him from entering the chamber.

'If you don't let me in I'll fall again,' Pei Jin said. 'Then the lower half of my body will be crippled and your future happiness will disappear.'

'Go ahead and fall,' Yan Shi Ning said and she wanted to close the other half of the window.

Pei Jin's grip on the window was slipping. He quickly used both hands to hold onto the window and purposely glanced at Yan Shi Ning's chest.

'You're not wearing undergarments?' Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning looked down at her chest. Her loose inner robe was opened and half of her chest was visible. It was the humidity's fault that she wasn't wearing undergarments beneath her inner robe.

She quickly pulled the collar of her inner robe together with both hands.

Pei Jin took advantage of her flustered state to enter the chamber and lay on the bed.

'Big brother, get off the bed!' Yan Shi Ning said.

She stepped to the bed and wanted to pull him off the bed. But he laughed and rolled away from her reach on the bed.

'Mistress, are you alright?' the same maid asked again from outside the chamber.

Yan Shi Ning closed her mouth but Pei Jin sat on the bed and pulled her onto

the bed.

He hugged her and he smiled lecherously.

‘I dare you to scream,’ Pei Jin whispered and blew on her ear.

Yan Shi Ning’s face turned bright red. Luckily it was a dark night. He would mock her if he could see her blushing.

Unexpectedly Pei Jin’s wide hand stroked her cheek.

‘Your cheek is hot,’ Pei Jin whispered. ‘Are you embarrass?’

Yan Shi Ning gripped his arm and bit his hand.

‘Ah!’ Pei Jin cried out.

Yan Shi Ning’s mouth wouldn’t let go of his hand so his free hand squeezed her bottom, but he accidentally pressed one of the acupuncture points on her waist. His intention was to squeeze her bottom to cause her to use both her hands to remove his hand on her bottom, and her mouth would let go of his hand. He didn’t expect she gained meat on her bottom since the last time he saw her.

The maid didn’t hear her mistress’ response and feared something bad had happened to her mistress. The maid quickly pushed the chamber door open.

Pei Jin reacted faster and pulled the beaded curtains down.

The maid entered the dark chamber and she couldn’t see clearly behind the beaded curtains.

‘Mistress are you alright?’ the maid asked. ‘Why were there strange noises coming from your chamber?’

Yan Shi Ning recovered from her shock and she glanced at Pei Jin hidden on the bed next to her.

‘It’s nothing,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I was hitting a mosquito.’

Yan Shi Ning hit Pei Jin’s arm to demonstrate hitting a mosquito.

The maid was relieved her mistress was alright, left the chamber and closed the door.

‘That was close,’ Pei Jin said. ‘She almost discovered me on your bed.’

Yan Shi Ning laughed. 'Big brother, do you know how to be scared?'

'Of course I'm scared,' Pei Jin teased. 'If she discovered me on your bed then tomorrow she would spread a rumor that each time the older Lady Yan felt lonely, Lady Yan would sneak a man into Lady Yan's chamber in the middle of the night.'

'Big brother, why aren't you leaving?' Yan Shi Ning asked resentfully.

'Leave?' Pei Jin asked. 'Of course I need to leave.' He left the bed to take off his shoes and laid back on the bed. 'I'll be leaving in the morning.'

Yan Shi Ning sat abruptly on the bed. She saw his eyes were closed and he was sleeping comfortably.

She knew it was pointless to kick him out of the chamber and she was forced to oblige to let him sleep. She laid back on the bed as far away from him as possible.

After a while Pei Jin opened his mouth. 'Why didn't you run away? I came here this late to see if you had ran away.'

Yan Shi Ning looked at him suspiciously. She didn't know if he was being honest. For every ten sentences he spoke, nine of them were lies.

'Thank you ninth prince for reminding me,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'It appears I can't leave anymore,' Pei Jin said and took off his outer robe. 'Besides, starting tomorrow night we'll be sleeping together. Tonight is a good experience for us to get used to sleeping together.'

Yan Shi Ning felt choked with suspicions. She pulled the blanket over her body out of fear his arms and legs would wander.

Pei Jin saw her clearly protecting her body. He smiled, the little lion was nervous. It was amusing to tease the little lion.

'Little lion, are you willingly marrying me?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes. Although his tone sounded like he was jesting, but his eyes looked serious and it was hard for her to see through him.

'How can I refuse you?' Yan Shi Ning asked. She didn't want fight with him for

his amusement. Instead she smiled and spoke in the gentlest tone. 'Marrying ninth prince is a blessing that will last for three lifetimes.'

Pei Jin frowned. 'Is that how you feel?'

'Of course,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Ninth prince is an intelligent and handsome man. There are too many young ladies who wish to marry you. I'm petty and I have no talents. Of course I'm grateful, it's a miracle that I'm marrying you.'

Yan Shi Ning spoke smoothly enough for her words to sound convincing to other people, but he knew she was mocking him.

Pei Jin laughed. 'You're an expert liar.'

'It's because you taught me well,' Yan Shi Ning said and laughed.

'You actually want to marry me,' Pei Jin said. 'It's a pity that I was forced to marry you.'

'What do you mean?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning didn't expect he was forced to marry her.

Pei Jin stared at Yan Shi Ning and he stopped himself from smiling. He sighed and spoke in a pitiful tone. 'The crown prince wants to marry your little sister and you're their obstacle. I was forced to be the sacrifice. I thought you marrying someone had no relation to me. But I returned to the imperial city from Southern Jiang at the wrong time. In the palace I looked in all four directions and feared that I would be the sacrifice. Indeed my fear was real and I became the sacrifice.'

Pei Jin looked seriously at Yan Shi Ning for a while. 'Think about it. You're the prime minister's daughter and in the future your little sister will be married to the crown prince. You need to be married to someone from high in the sky. Before I returned to the imperial city, there wasn't anyone suitable for you and you could only choose from someone below you. But I'm back in the imperial city and it's not the same as before. Didn't you see everyone's eyes looking at me? I'm a prince with a weak status in imperial court and you're the prime minister's daughter with a weak status in the Yan household. We're a fated pair matched by the heavens.'

Pei Jin paused and sighed. 'I was forced to marry you.'

Yan Shi Ning looked carefully at Pei Jin. Each of his words clearly entered her ears but when it entered her heart, it made her heart ache. She didn't care who she would marry and thought perhaps her marriage candidate wouldn't willingly marry her. But she didn't expect her thoughts would be voiced by the trouble maker in front of her.

'Then it must be hard for ninth prince,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning rolled over and her back faced Pei Jing. She closed her eyes and ignored him.

Pei Jin felt frustrated. He expected the little lion would only be angry like earlier and hit him. He thought of those reasonable words to tease her. The heavens knew that seeing her act docile made his heart ache. He didn't expect she would be angry to that extent. He knew he had to quickly console her and hoped she would be easily consoled like in the past.

'I was teasing you,' Pei Jin confessed. 'Don't think it's the truth. The moment I heard about the crown prince and your little sister's situation, I knew you would need to be married soon and I rushed from Southern Jiang to return to the imperial city. You don't know how hard it was for me to leave Southern Jiang, the citizens there rather die than let me go. I had to climb the wall in the middle of the night. I resorted to whipping a horse and rode all the way here. How can my little lion marry another man? The heavens know many years I waited for you to become an adult.'

Yan Shi Ning turned her head around and spoke through gritted teeth. 'Big brother, will you die if you don't lie?'

Yan Shi Ning heard those familiar lies too many times. In the past each time they met, he would say those sweet words to tease her. If he thought she would easily believe him like the first time he told those familiar lies to her then he was a foolish rabbit prince.

Pei Jin rubbed his chin. 'It appears I've spoken these words before. Next time I need to think of something new to say to you.'

'Go into your grave!' Yan Shi Ning said.



Yan Shi Ning couldn't suppress her anger anymore and kicked in the direction of Pei Jin's leg.

Pei Jin avoided Yan Shi Ning's kick and pulled her into his chest. 'This is more like the real you. Will you believe me if I say I'll be honest with you in the future?'

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin suspiciously.

Pei Jin's eyes swept over Yan Shi Ning's chest. 'Like... how I touched your chest before. It feels like compared to when you were a little girl, it hasn't grown that much.'

Yan Shi Ning mentally cursed mouthy boy. She regretted no one came to kill him.

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End of Chapter Four

***Related***

# part 1



## Chapter Five (Part 1)

Outside the Yan Manor the nightwatchman struck bamboo sticks together.

Pei Jin awoken by the sounds of the struck bamboo sticks. He heard the nightwatchman signalled it was the hour of the ox (1am to 3am). He watched Yan Shi Ning who was sleeping peacefully next to him for a while. Then he parted the beaded curtains, got out of bed and stepped toward the table.

On the table incense sticks were burning, giving off a faint scent. Pei Jin's eyes darkened. The last time he met Yan Shi Ning in the palace, he had smelt the same faint scent on her body. At that time he thought the scent was familiar and didn't think too much about it. It wasn't until he laid in bed next to Yan Shi Ning did it occur to him that the scent was eerily familiar. He didn't want to make Yan Shi Ning anxious so he kept quiet about the scent. It was the same scent his adoptive mother, Consort Chen used that year.

His birth mother was a palace maid who died after giving birth to him. When his mother died, Consort Chen didn't have children. Consort Chen asked his father to let her adopt him and his father consented.

Consort Chen was a gentle and kind person. She had a healthy body and was pregnant near the age of thirty. But during her pregnancy her health slowly declined. The imperial physicians who examined her reported the same outcome, she had a mysterious illness.

Consort Chen was isolated in a cold chamber of the palace and a rumor was spread about the 'Jin curse,' whoever was his mother wouldn't survive a pregnancy. Consort Chen died when she was four months pregnant. Before she died she gripped the incense sticks in her hand, cried and told him that someone poisoned her.

Pei Jin became ill after Consort Chen died. But a young physician entered the palace and examined him. The physician told him that the incense sticks were poisoned. After he recovered, the physician resigned and left the palace. He hid the incense sticks and studied medicine under the guidance of the imperial physicians to secretly find out what was the poison added to the incense sticks. The incense sticks he hid didn't have wings, but it flew away. He searched for them but he didn't find out who had taken them.

Pei Jin regretted that Consort Chen's death was still unresolved. Unexpectedly twelve years later the incense sticks reappeared in the Yan Manor, inside Yan Shi Ning's chamber. His eyes narrowed while thinking about who wanted to harm Yan Shi Ning. His intuition conjured an image in his mind of the haughty and cold face of Yan Shi Ning's step-mother, Princess Kang Hua.

Princess Kang Hua and the empress' relationship was good whereas Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ning's relationship was bad. His heart pounded endlessly, luckily he discovered the incense sticks before it could seriously harm Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin contemplated for a while and decided to take the incense sticks away to show someone at his manor. He searched for fabrics around the chamber and found Yan Shi Ning's undergarments. He smiled, picked up her undergarments and wrapped the incense sticks.

Pei Jin was about to leap out of the window when he remembered the purpose of his visit. He took out a jade pendant, walked to the bed and carefully put it on Yan Shi Ning's palm.

'This is something I won from an elder in Southern Jiang,' Pei Jin whispered. 'I thought it was a fake jade but it turned out to be a rare jade pendant. I was going to sell it but I thought about you. Apart from the tao (a Chinese toy drum) I gave you, I haven't given you anything else. This will be my love token to you. It

took a long time to carve the jade pendant for you, forgive me for my amateur craftsmanship.'

Pei Jin gently stroked Yan Shi Ning's head and quickly leapt out the window.

The nightwatchman signalled it was the hour of the tiger (3am to 5am) and Pei Jin couldn't wait until his and Yan Shi Ning's wedding ceremony.

Yan Shi Ning awoken from a nightmare. In the nightmare she was a six-year-old again, the first time she met Pei Jin. That year she heard Pei Jin's adoptive mother, Consort Chen who was four months pregnant had died. Pei Jin's teacher resigned but Pei Jin's teacher asked the emperor if he could take Pei Jin to stay with him in his country home while Pei Jin was grieving. The emperor could see Pei Jin's grief and agreed.

Unfortunately Pei Jin's teacher's country home was in Xuan Qing, next to Dung Thi and Yan Shi Ning's home.

In Yan Shi Ning's nightmare it was that afternoon she was on her way home after a fight with other children, she saw Pei Jin stood with the sunset behind his back.

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was a handsome boy. But she was curious why Pei Jin was staring up at the sky.

'Big brother, what are you looking at?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'I'm looking at the rice noodle rolls fallen from the sky,' Pei Jin said.

'Liar, only bird poo fall from the sky,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Little sister, I'm not lying,' Pei Jin said. 'I caught this rice noodle roll from the sky.'

Pei Jin showed Yan Shi Ning the rice noodle roll in his hand and ate it.

Yan Shi Ning saw the serious expression on Pei Jin's face and she believed him. Afterward she tilted her head back and she stared up at the sky.

'Little sister, you can't stand here,' Pei Jin said. 'You need to stand over there.'

Yan Shi Ning walked to the spot Pei Jin pointed to then she fell into the hole he dug and concealed!

Yan Shi Ning sobbed loudly. Pei Jin's teacher heard the commotion and ran outside his home.

'Pei Jin, what are you doing?' Pei Jin's teacher asked.

'Teacher, I saw a little girl fell into a hole,' Pei Jin said. 'When I walked to the hole, little sister was crying. I wanted to give her the rice noodle roll that teacher's wife made to console her. But I don't know how to pull little sister up from the hole.'

Yan Shi Ning's body shook with anger while she sobbed. She didn't know how Pei Jin maintained a serious expression while lying smoothly. She cried louder, she was fooled by the liar!

Luckily Yan Shi Ning's nightmare ended at that moment. She looked at her surroundings and sighed in relief when she saw the spot next to her on the bed was empty. The morning sunlight shone through the window and she reluctantly sat up on the bed.

'Heavens!' Yan Shi Ning cursed.

The six-year-old Yan Shi Ning fell into a hole but was quickly pulled out of the hole. Unfortunately twelve years later she fell into a hole for life. There wouldn't be escape even after death.

Yan Shi Ning cursed mouthy boy. What danger? What grieving? Mouthy boy was allowed to leave the palace because his teacher feared his life was in danger and didn't want him to grieve deeply by himself. But she saw his real personality behind his grieving mask.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know how mouthy boy could deceive other people. What gentle ninth prince? He was a deadly liar! She reasoned that other people must be blind if they believed he was capable of being gentle and kind.

Yan Shi Ning felt insanely angry. She wanted to break apart her bed but when she fisted her hands, she felt something hard. It was a beautiful jade pendant. She looked closer at the jade pendant and she almost spat out blood. Little lion was engraved at the top of the jade pendant. She didn't need to think too deeply to know who the owner of the jade pendant was.

Yan Shi Ning got out of bed and searched everywhere in the chamber for her

undergarments but it was missing.

‘Big brother, why did you take my undergarments?’ Yan Shi Ning mumbled.

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End of Chapter Five (Part 1)

***Related***



## part 2



### Chapter Five (Part 2 of 2)

The emperor held a wedding banquet for Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning at the palace.

The emperor wasn't close with Pei Jin, but the emperor ordered the palace servants to prepare an extravagant banquet worthy of a prince.

Everyone were captivated by ninth gentle prince's handsomeness in his wedding attire and many unwed women were envious they weren't the bride.

But everyone understood that both the handsome groom and the bride were unfavored children in their families, which made them the perfect pair.

The crown prince and seventh prince's supporters were relieved that gentle ninth prince married someone with no family connections that had power in court. They were happy gentle ninth prince truly didn't want to be emperor.

All the wedding guests were curious why there was a bruise on the groom's forehead.

'I was too excited about marrying Lady Yan that I walked into a door,' Pei Jin explained to the wedding guests.

The wedding guests believed the groom's explanation without suspicions. But the bride's mouth frowned under the red veil.

The sounds of firecrackers thundered throughout the palace.

The bride and groom kowtowed to the heavens, their parents and to each other. Afterward the bride was brought to the bridal chamber.

Yan Shi Ning kept silent and was unhappy throughout the wedding ceremony. But the moment she sat on a bed, her nervousness surfaced. Mouthy boy didn't follow tradition and stood in front of the bed for a long time instead of immediately leaving the bridal chamber to drink congratulatory wine with the wedding guests.

Yan Shi Ning wanted to pull her veil off to see what mouthy boy was scheming. But there were still other people inside the chamber so she didn't want to shock them by not behaving like a virtuous lady.

Pei Jin didn't want to leave the bridal chamber. He stood silently thinking of a way to discreetly look at his wife's face. A while later he smiled.

'Something fell on the floor!' Pei Jin cried out.

Pei Jin crouched and his wife's veil 'accidentally' fell. He stood up and whispered in his wife's ear. 'Wait for me, I'll return soon.'

Yan Shi Ning saw the fake apologetic expression on mouthy boy's face and she used all her will strength to suppress her anger.

Pei Jin was satisfied he got to see his wife's face and happily left the chamber.



The little lion was indeed beautiful on their wedding day.

After Yan Shi Ning was left alone in the chamber, her pained body collapsed on the bed. Unfortunately her back landed on countless jujubes (Chinese red dates). Her stomach rumbled, at least the jujubes were edible and she quickly ate the jujubes.

Pei Jin kept his promise, Yan Shi Ning didn't get to blink many times before he returned to the chamber. She hurriedly put her veil back on and sat upright on the bed.

'No one needs to support me,' Pei Jin said. 'I'm not drunk! Ninth prince? Who is ninth prince? I'm not ninth prince. Are you Gentleman Li? No? Who are you? Seventh brother? Perhaps I'm drunk. I'm not a good wine drinker, forgive me. Today is such a happy day and I drank too much wine... don't need to support me. I can walk on my own. Everyone can continue drinking... where is the door? There's the door... no? Why is the door so high?'

'Ninth prince, that's a window!' a wedding guest warned.

Yan Shi Ning almost laughed loudly. Of course mouthy boy would climb through a window. She remembered that year he drank many wine jars yet he was still sober. What not a good wine drinker? What a liar!

A sober Pei Jin entered the chamber, closed the door and rushed to the bed. 'Wife, did you wait long?'

Pei Jin pulled off the veil. Under the lit red candles, he stared at the soft glow of Yan Shi Ning's beautiful face.

'Big brother, what are you looking at?' Yan Shi Ning asked impatiently.

Pei Jin raised his hand and touched Yan Shi Ning's lips.

Yan Shi Ning's body stiffened at the warm touch of Pei Jin's fingers on her lips. She looked at his intense gaze and her heart pounded.

Suddenly Pei Jin laughed. 'Look at how nervous you are. I was looking at what was on your lips.'

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin's fingers, it was the skin of a jujube. Heavens! She received a deadly scare.

‘Someone was thinking too much before,’ Pei Jin teased. He sat on the bed and took off his shoes. ‘It’s alright to think too much, sooner or later it will happen. Wife, come here and we can perform the main event together.’

‘What main event?’ Yan Shi Ning asked in a panicked tone.

‘What did you say?’ Pei Jin teased and took off his outer robe.

The words ‘wedding night’ echoed in Yan Shi Ning’s head.

Pei Jin saw the anxiety on Yan Shi Ning’s face and he laughed loudly. ‘What other main event is there? Of course bathing then sleeping.’

A while later the wedding guests that were eavesdropping outside the bridal chamber were smiling slyly.

‘Big brother, be gentle!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

‘Is this spot more comfortable?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘It hurts!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

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End of Chapter Five (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Six



## Chapter Six

Yan Shi Ning sat on the bed and gripped her leg.

Pei Jin was smiling and licking his lips.

‘Big brother, are you certain you know what you’re doing?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Be patient,’ Pei Jin said and continuously moved his hands.

Yan Shi Ning cried silent tears of pleasure and pain. Who could tell her when mouthy boy began learning to massage feet? Why did her feet need to be sacrificed?

Pei Jin finally let go of her tortured feet and she rolled over on the bed. She’d rather die than let him massage her feet again. His massaging skills were too deadly.

Pei Jin laughed. He stopped massaging Yan Shi Ning’s feet after he heard the wedding guests were far away from the chamber.

‘Wife, did you roll on the bed excitedly because you’re feeling impatient?’ Pei Jin teased. ‘Wait for a little while, your husband will satisfy you.’

Pei Jin smiled and he left the bed.

Yan Shi Ning glared at the scoundrel's back and cursed him in her stomach.

Pei Jin hurriedly washed his face and brushed his hair. Then he returned to the bed and saw Yan Shi Ning hugged the blanket in the corner of the bed.

‘Wife, are you honestly going to sleep like this?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin wore his undergarments to bed and bared his chest. He grinned wide enough for his white teeth to be visible. It made Yan Shi Ning felt like words were not enough to reflect his handsomeness. But she wore her wedding dress and looked sternly at him.

Pei Jin laid on the bed and faced the tensed Yan Shi Ning. ‘Wife, aren’t you known for being gentle and docile? Then you must know what it means to be a wife. Come here, your husband wants you to serve him.’

Yan Shi Ning’s eyes shone daggers, she knew that mouthy boy wasn’t going to let the night pass without torturing her to death.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning’s angry eyes and his smile became brighter. He pulled her to his chest. ‘Come here. Let’s not waste a spring night.’

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning’s waist tightly and he could hear her deep breaths.

Yan Shi Ning’s body stiffened. A while later she regained her composure and pushed Pei Jin’s chest. But her hands felt scorched the moment she touched his bare chest and she quickly retrieved her hands.

Pei Jin caught Yan Shi Ning’s wrists. ‘If you want to touch then touch. A thousand times, you don’t need to be courteous.’

Yan Shi Ning’s teeth itched at the sight of Pei Jin’s lecherous smile, she lowered her head and wanted to bite his hand.

Pei Jin was prepared for Yan Shi Ning’s reaction. He pinned her wrists above her head, rolled over and pressed his body on top of hers. ‘Do you want to bite me again?’

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t move her hands, her legs were trapped and felt a heaviness on her stomach. In her weakened position under Pei Jin, her intuition warned her she was going to be eaten whole.

‘Why is it that I feel you would rather die than be submissive?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What is it, don’t you want to do it together with me... if you truly don’t want to, you can tell me and I won’t force you. You can believe me, I’ll respect your decision.’

Yan Shi Ning struggled even more after she heard mouthy boy’s fake gentlemanly words. What respect? His hands were quickly taking off her dress. What believe in him? She didn’t get to blink before his face slid from her neck down to her waist.

Yan Shi Ning’s struggles didn’t free her so she used the gentle approach. ‘Then ninth prince, what are my choices?’

Pei Jin nodded. ‘You can choose the positions.’

Yan Shi Ning smiled and inwardly cursed the scoundrel.

Pei Jin had taken off Yan Shi Ning’s outer robe and he tossed it to the side. She only had thin white undergarments to shield her body. He shook his head. Last night she didn’t wear undergarments but wore them on their wedding day. He became suspicious why the little lion stopped struggling under his body.

Pei Jin didn’t feel like an amused cat when the mouse didn’t struggle. ‘Why are you suddenly submissive?’

Yan Shi Ning smiled. ‘I suddenly thought it doesn’t matter who I marry, everyone will have a first time. Whether dying early or dying later, is still dying. It’s better to die earlier to reincarnate earlier. Ninth prince, you can slowly enjoy using my body.’

Yan Shi Ning laid limply on the bed and she let the bandit pluck what he wanted. She realised he only tortured her for amusement. She wasn’t going to satisfy his amusement by continuing to struggle. It was better for her to cooperate with him since she couldn’t escape a fate between a husband and a wife.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning’s defiant look that showed she didn’t care what he did to her. He didn’t feel defeated and decided to use another approach to counteract her acting like a dead corpse. He smiled and his hands slowly moved.

Initially Yan Shi Ning didn’t care what Pei Jin said or did. She pretended she was dead and didn’t move. But after his hand slid under her undergarments,

where his hand touched her skin, goose bumps would form against her will.

Pei Jin eyes swept over Yan Shi Ning's eyelashes, her pursed lips and his hand slid lower. 'Wife, if you're prepared to sacrifice yourself then you don't need to be nervous. Your husband will be gentle.'

Yan Shi Ning suppressed her anger. Since she didn't stop Pei Jin's hand, his hand movements became bolder. His hand stroked from her stomach to her waist and made her body trembled. She felt his hand detoured to her back and gently stroked from the top to the bottom of her back, it gave her a tingling sensation. Her body betrayed her will and curved upward closer to his body. But she continued to bite her lips and suppressed the sounds in her throat.

Yan Shi Ning refused to struggle and Pei Jin frowned. 'Wife, since you're not reacting to your husband's efforts, it appears your husband needs to exert more energy.'

Pei Jin untied the bow of Yan Shi Ning's undergarments. Her bare chest turned a little cold and she couldn't stop her head from turning to watch her undergarments being tossed away. Immediately it felt like fire was burning her face. Her undergarments were removed, there was nothing shielding her body from his hand.

Yan Shi Ning panicked a little, raised her head and looked at Pei Jin's smile that didn't waver.

'It's not cold tonight,' Pei Jin said. 'You don't need to wear clothes. It's better to take it off to make you feel comfortable.'

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's hand slid lower. Her undergarments were gone, where else could his hand move to? She gripped the flower petals on the bed. Unexpectedly his hand changed direction from her lower back to her waist. He held her waist and pulled her to his chest. There was no gap between their bodies. She felt something between his legs blossomed against her stomach and her heart almost escaped her body. But she didn't get a chance to react, he lowered his head and pressed his lips on her lips.

In that moment Yan Shi Ning felt like her world was going to collapse. Everything darkened and her soul floated away from her body. The residue image left in her head was Pei Jin's fiery eyes that didn't hide his desire.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's lips gently nibbled her lips. A little while later his lips suckled her lips and his tongue invaded her mouth. His tongue felt soft against her tongue and soon she forgot to breathe. He took a deep breath and his hands tightened on her waist as though he wanted their bones to join. She anticipated the most beautiful part of the night... but suddenly he let go of her.

'Wife, are you satisfied enough to lose your soul?' Pei Jin asked and licked his lips.

Yan Shi Ning realised she forgot to breathe and quickly took deep breaths. She looked at Pei Jin's clear eyes, the fiery desire had ebbed. She didn't understand what happened. Did the fiery desire in his eyes exist before? But she was certain she saw it clearly. She took another deep breath, she was fooled by mouthy boy!

'Did you think I was going to eat you?' Pei Jin asked and pulled Yan Shi Ning closer to him.

The chaos in Yan Shi Ning's heart continued to stir. She didn't want to admit that she did believe Pei Jin was going to eat her.

'Before I was only teasing you by giving you a scare,' Pei Jin said. 'Your husband is a gentleman, I've never forced anyone before. Besides, I promised you that I wouldn't force you. You can relax, if you're not willing then I won't force myself on you.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't know whether Pei Jin was sincere or fooling her.

Yan Shi Ning didn't want to look at Pei Jin's face anymore. She looked down carelessly and saw something between his legs was still blossoming. She quickly looked away. If he was only teasing her then it was suspicious for his body to react. She didn't understand why his body reacted but he pushed her away. Was he truly controlling his desire? She looked suspiciously at his face that didn't reveal anything but his fake gentle smile. Her head spun, she didn't know which of the scoundrel's words were honest and which words were lies.

Yan Shi Ning hugged the blanket and contemplated for half a day. She decided to believe Pei Jin was sincere he wouldn't force her if she wasn't willing. Although he owned a scoundrel's mouth and a bandit's hands, she knew he wasn't someone who would force himself on another person. For the first time her impression of him improved a little.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning's body relaxed and knew she believed him. His heart laughed loudly. Of course he wanted to eat her. He restrained himself because it was the wrong day to eat her. He needed to wait until her body recovered from the poison. When it was the right day to eat her, he would eat her thoroughly.

Pei Jin sighed. The heavens knew initially he intended to tease Yan Shi Ning for his amusement. Unexpectedly he was teasing fire and almost burned himself. If he didn't possess extraordinary self-control then he would have eaten her. Last night in her chamber he thought he would be able to enjoy a beautiful wedding night. But when he returned to his manor, he was informed he had to endure an uncomfortable long wedding night. He glanced down at his little brother and his frustrations intensified.

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End of Chapter Six

***Related***



# Seven



## Chapter Seven

Yan Shi Ning awoken early the following morning.

She immediately saw Pei Jin staring at her with eyes that looked like it wanted to play with fire. The heavens knew it was the first time he smiled lecherously endlessly.

Pei Jin pulled the blanket off Yan Shi Ning. ‘Wife, we need to leave the bed and greet the elders in their palace chamber.’

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the dim sky outside the window and she frowned. ‘I’ll go find an appropriate dress.’

Yan Shi Ning opened a chest. Inside the chest were her scarce belongings. She chose the best dress out of the ordinary dresses she owned.

Pei Jin glanced at the items inside Yan Shi Ning’s chest and he frowned. Although a few of the fabrics of her dresses were of acceptable quality, most of her dresses couldn’t compete with the beautiful dress she wore to the banquet in the palace a month ago.

‘What is it, something wrong?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Nothing,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I was remembering my wife looking heavenly the last time we met.’

Pei Jin diverting Yan Shi Ning’s attention dampened her heart a little more. ‘Whether I looked heavenly or not, I can’t compare with ninth prince.’

Princess Kang Hua had asked a dressmaker to make the few new dresses that Yan Shi Ning owned. In the last two years Princess Kang Hua treated her coldly and she never fussed over the poor quality fabrics of her dresses. Each month she was only allowed to have one request granted. She remembered the dress she wore to the banquet a month ago. Indeed her best dress inside the chest couldn’t even compare with Yan Shi Ting’s most ordinary dress.

Yan Shi Ning thought that the quality of her dresses were insignificant compared to living a peaceful life.

Pei Jin watched Yan Shi Ning stepped behind the screen to change into a dress and his eyes gleamed brightly. He shook his head, smiled and stepped to the bed. Then he lifted the white blanket, bit a finger and drops of blood dripped onto the blanket.

‘Ninth prince, can I come in?’ a flirtatious voice asked from outside the chamber.

Pei Jin let go of the blanket and looked at a dressed Yan Shi Ning who stepped out from the screen before he replied to the flirtatious voice, which gave her goose bumps all over her skin.

The chamber door was pushed open and several maids appeared with a basin of water and wash cloths. The maid leading them inside the chamber looked between seventeen and eighteen years old. The maid’s long hair was let down with a jade hairpin adorned on the left side of the maid’s hair and the maid walked in a sensual manner. Yan Shi Ning praised the maid’s beauty in her heart, but she wondered who the beauty was.

‘Ninth prince, let me help you change your clothes,’ the maid said.

Yan Shi Ning recognised the flirtatious voice belonged to the maid. She was suspicious why a maid would act like the mistress of the manor. She watched the maid smiled flirtatiously while helping Pei Jin change his clothes and she realised

the maid wasn't an ordinary maid.

Pei Jin's heart was weary of Su Yue's inappropriate closeness. He looked at Yan Shi Ning and he smile warmly. 'Su Yue, I can change my clothes on my own. You should serve my wife.'

'But I always serve ninth prince,' Su Yue said and pouted.

'You don't need to,' Pei Jin said. 'Quickly help my wife. It's getting late, my wife and I need to greet the elders.'

Su Yue couldn't refuse Pei Jin's request and she grudgingly stepped toward Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning looked at the cold contempt shown on Su Yue's face. Her intuition protested that Su Yue was too daring by looking down on her.

Yan Shi Ning thought Su Yue must be favored by Pei Jin, which was why Su Yue dared to act haughty. She glared at Pei Jin, it would be strange if there wasn't intimacy between him and Su Yue. What was there to deny? He didn't need to pretend he had no relation to Su Yue in front of her. Why else would his beauty reek of jealousy while standing beside her? She smiled coldly.

Pei Jin's eyes met Yan Shi Ning's gaze and her spring smile, yet his back turned cold.

Su Yue felt jealous seeing Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning exchange loving glances with each other while acting like she was a dead corpse. Su Yue thought about how since she entered Pei Jin's manor three years ago, she was always the one serving Pei Jin and didn't need to serve anyone else. She felt it was demeaning to serve a worthless Yan Shi Ning.

'Ah!' Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the comb in Su Yue's hand and she mourned for her lost hair.

'What happened?' Pei Jin asked and rushed over to Yan Shi Ning.

Su Yue knew she had committed a wrong and forced herself to apologise. 'I carelessly pulled mistress' hair... I'm used to serving ninth prince, it's not easy for me to serve someone else.'

Yan Shi Ning's eyes darkened briefly. She quickly turned her head around and smiled coldly at Pei Jin. 'Is that true? Then Su Yue should continue to serve ninth prince.'

Pei Jin didn't get a chance to explain before Su Yue interrupted.

'Mistress is right,' Su Yue said. 'It's better for a maid who mistress is familiar with to serve mistress. I've always been a maid close to ninth prince, it's more efficient if I continue to serve ninth prince.'

Yan Shi Ning felt repulsed when Su Yue emphasized 'close.' When Yan Shi Ning was unwed there were a few maids who were forced to occasionally serve her at the Yan Manor, but none of them were close to her. She lived for eighteen years without a personal maid.

In the past Yan Shi Ning lived with her mother in Xuan Qing. Her father did deliver silver taels to her mother. But her mother didn't spend a single of his silver taels and returned all his silver taels. Her mother worked hard to support their family in Xuan Qing. Although they were fed and clothed, they were not rich and only had one maid who was a widow.

After Yan Shi Ning's mother died, she wanted to bring the widow to the imperial city because she was only familiar with the widow apart from her mother. Unexpectedly the widow said that there were relatives the widow wanted to be reunited with and didn't want to go with her. In the end she travelled to the imperial city alone.

At the Yan Manor everyone followed Princess Kang Hua's lead and treated Yan Shi Ning coldly and looked down on her. Before her wedding her father asked her if she wanted to bring a maid to Pei Jin's manor. She didn't want to have a personal maid that wouldn't be loyal to her and politely declined her father's offer.

Yan Shi Ning understood Su Yue emphasized 'close' to boast that Pei Jin and Su Yue's relationship wasn't ordinary. Yan Shi Ning only smiled coldly at Pei Jin to silently ask him to deal with Su Yue.

Pei Jin felt his back turned colder. In his manor the most troublesome person was Su Yue who had a special background so he still hadn't found a suitable reason to kick Su Yue out of his manor. He had anticipated Yan Shi Ning would

deal with Su Yue on his behalf to kick Su Yue out of his manor. Unexpectedly Yan Shi Ning didn't reprimand Su Yue and Yan Shi Ning appeared like she was watching an amusing performance. He sighed inwardly. He almost forgot about Yan Shi Ning's gentle and docile image that she maintained in front of others, and understood he had to get rid of Su Yue himself.

Since Pei Jin didn't deny anything, Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin did favor Su Yue. That meant Yan Shi Ning needed to avenge her lost hair on her own. When Su Yue's back was facing her, she stepped on the hem of Su Yue's dress.

'Ah!' Su Yue cried out and fell on the floor.

Yan Shi Ning stood up abruptly and feigned concern for Su Yue. 'Why did you fall? Did you twist your ankle? Are you hurt?'

The collar of Su Yue's dress opened and revealed an ample chest above a tiny waist.

Su Yue pushed away Yan Shi Ning's hand and she looked tearfully at Pei Jin. 'Ninth prince, it hurts.'

The smile inside Pei Jin's stomach was longer than his intestines. He knew the little lion wasn't an easy opponent, if anyone provoked her then she would repay them. No matter how often he provoked her in the last twelve years, she didn't begrudge him because she always immediately took revenge after being wronged. He felt it was indeed an amusing morning.

Pei Jin acted shocked and concerned. 'Why did you fall? Someone help Su Yue up and take her to Bei Dou to examine her. A thousand times I hope nothing bad happened.' He turned around to face Yan Shi Ning and he spoke in a gentler tone. 'Wife, are you ready? If you are then let's depart. I don't want the elders to wait long. Come here, I'll support you outside.'

Su Yue looked resentfully at Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's retreating backs. Wasn't Pei Jin supposed to carry her off the floor and fuss over her? Why did Pei Jin support another woman? Yan Shi Ning wasn't the one injured, what was there to support? Su Yue remembered the moans from Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's chamber last night and it made her angrier.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ning turned around and looked at Su Yue. 'I almost forgot. Su

Yue, you shouldn't wear long dresses. If you change your dress then you'll prevent falls in the future.'

Su Yue ignored Yan Shi Ning. She looked pitifully at Pei Jin and sulked. 'Ninth prince, you said that I look beautiful in this dress. That's why I wear this dress often.'

Pei Jin glanced at Su Yue. 'Is that so? Su Yue, you're naturally beautiful. It wouldn't matter what dress you wear you'll still be beautiful, go ahead and change into a different dress.' He smiled at Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, let's go.'

After Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning left the chamber another maid helped Su Yue stand up. 'Big sister Su, do you want to go to see Gentleman Bei and let him examine you?'

Su Yue puffed her chest. 'I don't need to see that demon physician!'

Bei Dou had been a physician in Pei Jin's manor for many years. But Bei Dou had a scary aura that apart from Pei Jin, everyone feared Bei Dou.

Outside Pei Jin's manor, Yan Shi Ning sat inside a horse carriage and she smiled coldly.

Pei Jin propped his chin on a hand and he smiled at Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, were you jealous before?'

'Your wife wouldn't dare,' Yan Shi Ning said without looking at Pei Jin.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning to his chest and kissed her deeply. 'Is that so? Then why did you step on her dress to make her fall?'

Yan Shi Ning pushed Pei Jin's chest. She knew he had noticed her stepping on Su Yue's dress before. 'Is that so? Why don't I remember? Perhaps ninth prince was mistaken.'

Pei Jin happily looked at the denial on Yan Shi Ning's face. He regretted there wasn't enough time to tease her body inside the carriage.

'Her name is Su Yue,' Pei Jin said. 'My adoptive grandfather Huang Guo who is a court official sent Su Yue to me. She is the niece of the head caretaker of Huang Guo's manor. She relies on her special background and acts haughty.'

Yan Shi Ning understood that Pei Jin's adoptive mother Consort Chen's

relatives' generosity would be hard to refuse. But she also heard Pei Jin emphasized 'special' and she smiled coldly. 'Isn't she someone ninth prince dotes on?'

Pei Jin wanted to explain but Yan Shi Ning stopped him.

'You don't need to explain,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I understand. She doesn't want to serve me and only wants to serve you well. It's admirable she is someone who pursues her dream.'

'What?' Pei Jin asked. 'Wife, don't you care if another woman wants to climb into your husband's bed?'

'Of course not,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'It's good for you to have many women in your bed.'

Pei Jin stared at Yan Shi Ning's calm face and he wanted to strangle her to death. He had hoped she had eaten vinegar before.

A while later Yan Shi Ning remembered something and she pulled out a jade pendant. 'That night you dropped this on my bed. Last night I forgot and earlier there was no opportunity to give this to you.'

Pei Jin knew Yan Shi Ning misunderstood but he didn't explain and put the jade pendant back on her hand. 'This jade pendant is from Southern Jiang. It looks like you. The moment it saw you it didn't want to leave you. If it feels close to you then you should keep it.'

'Big brother, you're the one that's close to it,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Your whole household is close to it.' She paused for a while. 'Big brother, why did you take my undergarments?'

'I don't remember taking your undergarments,' Pei Jin denied. 'Perhaps they feel close to me and secretly followed me.'

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin and she wanted to bite him.

'Wife be good,' Pei Jin said. 'If you want to bite me, you need to wait until we return home tonight and you can slowly bite me. Remember not to glare at me in front of the elders. You're known for being gentle and docile, don't accidentally reveal your true tail.'

‘Ninth prince, remember to wear your mask tightly,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If you’re not careful you’ll drop it and expose your true lying scoundrel self.’

‘We’re the same,’ Pei Jin said.

The horse halted and the perfect gentle newlyweds stepped out of the horse carriage.

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End of Chapter Seven

***Related***



# Eight



## Chapter Eight

At the palace the emperor held a meeting with the court officials.

The empress, Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning waited for the emperor in the De Fang chamber.

The empress was forty years old, but she maintained her youthful appearance and looked no older than thirty years old. The empress wore an intricately embroidered silk dress and she was seated high on a platform next to the chair reserved for the emperor. She smiled politely at Yan Shi Ning. ‘Little girl, I remember the first time I met you two years ago. I thought you were beautiful and I didn’t know who would be blessed to marry you. If I knew back then you would marry little nine then I would have asked little nine to come back to the imperial city earlier.’

The empress’ fake praises didn’t enter Yan Shi Ning’s heart. Although in the past Yan Shi Ning didn’t meet the empress often, it was clear to her that the empress’ loyalty was reserved for Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting. Princess Kang Hua hated her so there was no reason for the empress to love her. Besides, everyone in the palace had years of experience of giving fake praises, especially someone of a high status like the empress.

‘Imperial mother, you are too kind,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I’m blessed to be married to ninth prince.’

Yan Shi Ning smiled politely at Pei Jin.

‘Imperial mother, I’m the one who is blessed to marry Xiao Ning,’ Pei Jin said sweetly and smiled warmly at Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning refrained from vomiting earlier when Pei Jin called her ‘wife’ endearingly in front of the maids, but she felt more nauseous after hearing Pei Jin called her ‘Xiao Ning’ too sweetly.

The empress’ ears stiffened after hearing the newlyweds’ loving exchange. It reminded her of the year she married the emperor. Except the emperor married her to secure the throne. She didn’t know if the newlyweds’ situation was similar to her and the emperor... it couldn’t be, the deep love aura in Pei Jin’s eyes were too clear.

Suddenly the empress felt Pei Jin’s warm smile was too blinding. She picked up a cup, drank a sip of tea and hid her cold smile. She put the cup down and smiled politely. ‘I’m happy to see the strong bond between the two of you. My heart was saddened when little nine was heartbroken after the little girl Yewu... forgive a muddled elder like me, I shouldn’t talk about the sad past. You two should start eating. The imperial cooks made many delicious food.’

The empress saw Yan Shi Ning frown like she expected and she smiled brightly. She glanced at Pei Jin but his head was lowered while drinking tea.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t remember who Yewu was and frowned. She thought deeply and finally remembered six years ago when Pei Jin was eighteen years old, the emperor arranged a marriage between Pei Jin and a court official’s daughter Yewu. Yan Shi Ning was overjoyed and relieved Pei Jin was going to marry Yewu, it meant he wouldn’t look for her in Xuan Qing and trouble her anymore. Unfortunately less than two months after their betrothal was announced, Yewu became severely ill and died. Then Pei Jin asked the emperor to allow him to visit his former teacher’s country home in Xuan Qing while he grieved for Yewu. The emperor consented and during Pei Jin’s grieving period, Pei Jin bullied Yan Shi Ning in Xuan Qing.

Yan Shi Ning’s heart laughed mockingly. The empress’ intention to strain hers and Pei Jin’s relationship was too clear. The empress wasted her saliva, even if Pei Jin married Yewu, she wouldn’t be depressed.

‘The emperor, crown prince and Consort Mu are approaching De Fang,’ a guard announced.

Everyone inside the De Fang chamber stood to kowtow and greet the emperor.

While Yan Shi Ning kowtowed on the floor she felt the emperor’s gold sleeve swept past and her anxiety surfaced. It was the first time she officially met her father-in-law who had the highest status under the sky.

‘Everyone can rise,’ the emperor said. ‘We’re all one family, there’s no need for imperial protocols.’

The emperor sat on his chair next to the empress and he accepted the cup of tea from the empress.

Everyone obeyed the emperor and sat down. The empress sat on the emperor’s left side and the crown prince sat next to the empress. Consort Mu sat on the right of the emperor and Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning sat below Consort Mu.

The empress glanced at Consort Mu and was unhappy Consort Mu’s dress was more beautiful than her dress but she smiled politely. ‘Today little sister looks beautiful.’

Consort Mu had battled with the empress for decades and understood the empress always hid a dagger behind a praise. She knew the empress was accusing her of purposely outshining Pei Jin’s new bride.

‘No matter how beautiful I look, big sister is always more beautiful,’ Consort Mu said and sighed. ‘But the years and months haven’t been kind on me. I need to wear thick makeup if I want to go outside my chamber. I need to choose my dress carefully too, unlike a young bride who can wear any dress and still look beautiful.’

The empress sat upright. She glanced at the poor fabric quality of Yan Shi Ning’s dress and shook her head. Indeed her little sister Kang Hua hated Dung Thi and Yan Shi Ning deeply, it was clear Kang Hua didn’t want to waste a single silver tael on Yan Shi Ning.

The empress didn’t care if Kang Hua hated Dung Thi and Yan Shi Ning. What she cared about was Consort Mu using Yan Shi Ning’s ordinary dress to insult

her. She knew Consort Mu implied that Yan Shi Ning's family must be poor. How was it possible for a prime minister and his wife be poor? Then it was reasonable Yan Shi Ning was mistreated by Kang Hua, which reflected badly on her. Also Yan Shi Ning married Pei Jin, if she didn't care about Yan Shi Ning's appearance it meant that she was looking down on the emperor's son and daughter-in-law.

Indeed after the emperor heard Consort Mu's words, he looked at Yan Shi Ning and frowned. Although he didn't favour Pei Jin, he wouldn't allow anyone to look down on Pei Jin.

'I remember when Kang Hua was a little girl, she always acted recklessly,' the emperor said. He put the cup down and glared at the empress. 'I didn't expect she would stay the same even after being married. As her older sister you should teach her boundaries.'

The empress lowered her head. 'It's my fault for being careless.'

The empress cursed Consort Mu in her stomach. Whereas Consort Mu was satisfied about the outcome and didn't say anything else.

Yan Shi Ning's head ached. The empress and Consort Mu dragged her into their battle and she didn't want to offend either of them. She didn't know if she should praise Princess Kang Hua in front of everyone to appease the empress. Then she thought if it was better for her to not deny she was a pitiful mistreated step-daughter. Her head ached more, she didn't have any experiences dealing with battles in the palace.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at Pei Jin who was lowering his head as though his ears and mouth were dead. She realised Pei Jin chose the right approach, acting dead was the safest choice.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ning's back shivered. She felt like someone was staring at her with bad intentions.

Yan Shi Ning raised her head and unexpectedly the eyes that were staring at her belonged to the crown prince. He quickly looked away after their eyes met. It made her suspicious why he would care if she caught him staring at her.

The crown prince, Pei Lam was eighteen years old. He was a beautiful young man. When Yan Shi Ning first met him she thought he was a beautiful rich young

lady who dressed in men's clothes for amusement.

Pei Lam was flustered Yan Shi Ning caught him staring at her. He regretted she married Pei Jin. Pei Lam knew in the Yan Manor were two young mistresses. But at every banquet held at the palace Yan Shi Ting always shadowed him and didn't give him a chance to carefully assess Yan Shi Ning. Until the banquet a month ago, his heart was moved when he looked at Yan Shi Ning closely for the first time.

Pei Lam didn't care that Yan Shi Ting was more beautiful than Yan Shi Ning. He hated Yan Shi Ting and he wouldn't spend time with Yan Shi Ting if his mother didn't force him. He regretted that day he drank too much and slept with Yan Shi Ting in his drunken state. If that day never happened then he would never willingly marry Yan Shi Ting. He felt Yan Shi Ting was too controlling. His ideal wife was someone who was beautiful and gentle, Yan Shi Ning. A month ago, Yan Shi Ning wore a beautiful dress and she looked heavenly under the setting sun. Yan Shi Ning's gentle smile captivated him and carved deep in his heart. He had missed Yan Shi Ning since that day and he was heartbroken when Yan Shi Ning married Pei Jin.

Yan Shi Ning was unhappy throughout the meal with Pei Jin's family in the palace. She hated how the emperor had a close bond with seventh prince and the crown prince yet the emperor treated Pei Jin coldly. Everyone else followed the emperor's behaviour and they looked down on Pei Jin. She wasn't fooled that on the surface the meal was to celebrate hers and Pei Jin's marriage, but the truth was she and Pei Jin were merely decorations in everyone's eyes.

From the moment Yan Shi Ning stepped into the De Fang chamber, her intuition warned her the atmosphere was strangely familiar. After the meal, she realised the atmosphere resembled the Yan Manor. She and Pei Jin were alike, unloved and viewed as insignificant by their families. Except, Pei Jin's life inside the palace was more pitiful than her life inside the Yan Manor. Although her father was useless under Princess Kang Hua's control, at least occasionally her father didn't neglect her. Her heart ached for Pei Jin who had no one inside the palace who would at least ask him about his health. Each time she glanced at Pei Jin, he smiled gently in front of everyone but they ignored his presence.

After Yan Shi Ning struggled to eat food at the palace, she was happy to leave.

Pei Jin led her to the horse carriage, but they were stopped by Consort Mu and seventh prince, Pei Zhang at the palace gardens.

‘I came here to see the flowers blossoming, I didn’t expect to meet you two here,’ Consort Mu said. She smiled at Yan Shi Ning. ‘You’ll make me happy if you join me in my chamber and talk with me.’

Yan Shi Ning was about to reply when Pei Jin spoke on her behalf.

‘Mother, Xiao Ning’s body is weak,’ Pei Jin said. ‘It’s better if I take Xiao Ning home to rest.’

Yan Shi Ning didn’t know when her body became weak. She glanced suspiciously at Pei Jin. She didn’t know why he didn’t want her to accompany Consort Mu, but she believed he had his reasons so she followed his lead. ‘Mother, I feel a close connection with you. But today I don’t know why my body is unwell. Forgive me for not accepting your kind invitation.’

Consort Mu acted regretful but she didn’t detain Yan Shi Ning. She took off a jade bracelet, gave it to Yan Shi Ning and advised her to take care of her body.

After Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning wasn’t within sight, Consort Mu’s polite smile disappeared.

‘It appears he doesn’t want to help us,’ Consort Mu said. ‘He doesn’t even want to step foot in my chamber. It shows he doesn’t want to be associated with us.’

Pei Zhang smiled coldly. ‘After he returned from Southern Jiang, I visited his manor many times, but he made many excuses to avoid seeing me. Luckily his relationship with the other side is neutral too.’

Consort Mu gripped the stem of a flower. ‘Don’t worry, one day he will help us. There’ll be other opportunities in the future, let me think of a way to force him.’

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End of Chapter Eight

***Related***

# part 1



## Chapter Nine (Part 1)

The horse carriage travelled from the palace to Pei Jin's manor.

Inside the horse carriage Yan Shi Ning poked Pei Jin's arm. 'Big brother, why didn't you let me visit Consort Mu's chamber?'

'Why do you want to go there?' Pei Jin asked. 'Aren't you scared of her dull company?'

Of course Yan Shi Ning didn't believe Pei Jin's excuse.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. 'Little lion, in the future when we're summoned to the palace stay away from Consort Mu unless it's necessary to talk her.'

'Why?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'I'm scared you'll be fooled by her,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning suppressed her temper. 'Ninth prince, is there anything else?'

'Of course,' Pei Jin said. 'You can't impulsively eat, bully and believe other people. Mainly eat more rice and speak less. You only need to laugh and act foolish... wait, you don't need to act foolish, being yourself is enough.'

Pei Jin gently knocked Yan Shi Ning's head. She caught his hand and bit him. Her heart remembered his advice clearly, it knew behind the teasing tone was a deeper meaning.

After they returned to Pei Jin's manor, Yan Shi Ning wanted to rest in their

chamber but he stopped her.

‘Wait, I want you to meet someone in the manor,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning was suspicious who Pei Jin wanted her to meet. But she kept quiet because he looked serious.

Pei Jin’s manor was located north of the palace. There was an artificial lake, beautiful gardens and elegant chambers.

Pei Jin led Yan Shi Ning through the gardens. They stopped in front of a secluded chamber at the back of the manor. She could smell many herbal scents even before the door was opened.

Pei Jin looked at a young man dressed in black clothes and who carried bottles of remedies.

‘This is Gentleman Bei Dou, the manor’s physician,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Big brother, why do you want me to meet the physician?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin laughed. ‘He’s a physician and also my friend.’

Yan Shi Ning understood Pei Jin wouldn’t call someone a friend lightly. She didn’t know why Pei Jin wanted her to meet Bei Dou but she silently assessed Bei Dou.

Bei Dou looked about twenty years old, tall, wore black clothes, quiet, cold and distant. Yan Shi Ning felt like Bei Dou wasn’t someone easy to be close to. She was surprised Pei Jin was able to befriend someone like Bei Dou.

‘Do you wear perfume?’ Bei Dou asked coldly.

‘No,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Then what’s the perfume scent on your body?’ Bei Dou asked.

Yan Shi Ning shook her head, she honestly didn’t wear perfume.

‘Recently have you been burning incense sticks?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘Yes, at the Yan Manor,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘For how long?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘Almost one month,’ Yan Shi Ning said.



‘Where did you get the incense sticks?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘My little sister gave them to me,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘She said it was a gift from the palace. She showed me two kinds of incense sticks. One had a strong scent and the other had a faint scent. I chose the faint scene. Is there something wrong with them?’

‘Nothing,’ Bei Dou said. ‘You don’t suit the scent.’

Bei Dou tossed Yan Shi Ning one of the bottles he was carrying and he walked calmly into the chamber.

Yan Shi Ning felt Bei Dou was a strange young man who asked strange questions then abruptly became silent again. She looked at Pei Jin and her confused eyes asked him what had happened.

Pei Jin was upset with Bei Dou. He asked Bei Dou to subtly ask Yan Shi Ning about the incense sticks, he didn’t expect Bei Dou would ask directly.

Pei Jin escorted a confused Yan Shi Ning to their chamber and quickly returned to Bei Dou’s chamber.

‘I asked you to be subtle but you asked my wife directly,’ Pei Jin said. ‘What if my wife suspects something?’

‘I don’t have a habit of being subtle,’ Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin rubbed his temples. ‘When I gave you the incense sticks you told me I couldn’t sleep with my wife on our wedding night. Why?’

On the morning of Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s wedding day, he woke a sleeping Bei Dou up and gave him the incense sticks to examine. In the past he had confided in Bei Dou about the missing incense sticks, but Bei Dou couldn’t identify the poison without examining the incense sticks. So when the incense sticks reappeared in Yan Shi Ning’s chamber the first person he wanted to show was Bei Dou.

Bei Dou only sniffed the incense sticks and gave Pei Jin a vague advice, ‘these incense sticks are poison. You can’t sleep with your wife on your wedding night.’

Pei Jin continued to rub his temples while Bei Dou explained about the poison.

‘Seven poisons were used to make these incense sticks,’ Bei Dou said. ‘One of

the seven poisons is called Fu Gui. Fu Gui is naturally found in Western Ning. Fu Gui fruits are rare and not easy to pluck. After it's grown for ten years its flowers will bloom. Then ten years later it'll bear fruit. Fu Gui fruits smell similar to jasmine. It's hard for those who aren't physicians to distinguish between Fu Gui fruits and jasmine. If a person sniffs the scent of Fu Gui fruits then they'll feel relaxed. But if they sniff it continuously for months and years then their body will be poisoned. The poison will linger in their blood and they won't escape death. But the poison only affects women, especially pregnant women. Women who are affected die within a year, pregnant women will die within three months.'

Pei Jin's whole body turned cold. The symptoms Bei Dou explained to him was exactly what had happened to his adoptive mother, Consort Chen. Before she was pregnant she was healthy but three months after she was pregnant she was weak and lost weight. What Jin curse? Someone killed Consort Chen.

Bei Dou noticed Pei Jin's clenched hands, but he didn't offer any comforting words and continued to explain the other symptoms. 'A woman who is poisoned by Fu Gui can't sleep with a man. The effect of the poison will double each time she sleeps with a man. If she becomes pregnant then both she and the unborn child can't escape death.'

'Then what should I do?' Pei Jin asked.

'Lucky she didn't sniff the poison for a long period,' Bei Dou said. 'Her body will slowly release the poison. Combined with the cure, she'll recover faster, less than half a month.'

'Where is the cure?' Pei Jin asked.

'I gave it to your wife,' Bei Dou said.

'Why didn't you tell me earlier?' Pei Jin asked. 'When I brought my wife back to our chamber, she didn't like the stench of the herbs in the bottle you gave her. Luckily I explained to her that you wouldn't give someone something for no reason otherwise she would have thrown it away.'

'It's not a problem even if she throws it away,' Bei Dou said. 'The cure is easy to make.'

'Then must I endure not sleeping with my wife for half a month?' Pei Jin asked.

‘Do you have a solution?’

Pei Jin felt tormented to death sleeping in the same bed as his wife without eating her.

‘Yes,’ Bei Dou said.

‘What’s the solution?’ Pei Jin asked

‘Castration,’ Bei Dou said.

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End of Chapter Nine (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Nine (Part 2 of 2)

Pei Jin's throat constricted.

'Do you need to investigate this?' Bei Dou asked.

'Yes, someone killed Consort Chen because they didn't want her child to be born,' Pei Jin said. 'Behind her is Huang Guo and her other relatives. They feared for her life after she adopted me, especially when she was pregnant. The person used the Fu Gui poison to kill Consort Chen, her unborn child and to leave me unprotected. Destroying the roots by using one arrow to kill three birds is indeed a brilliant scheme.'

'The empress has always been a cruel schemer,' Bei Dou said.

'But I don't know why they would poison Shi Ning,' Pei Jin said.

Initially Pei Jin thought Princess Kang Hua hated Yan Shi Ning and wanted to kill Yan Shi Ning. But Yan Shi Ning said that she received the incense sticks less than a month ago. If Princess Kang Hua truly wanted to kill Yan Shi Ning then Princess Kang Hua would have begun to poison Yan Shi Ning the moment she arrived at the Yan Manor instead of waiting for two years.

‘This scheme also uses one arrow to kill two birds,’ Bei Dou said. ‘The empress doesn’t want you to have children and Princess Kang Hua wants to kill your wife. If your wife dies in the Yan Manor, people would be suspicious. But if she dies in your manor, no one would suspect them.’

Pei Jin’s father had three adult sons including himself. Apart from seventh prince’s daughter who was two years old, his other adult brothers didn’t have children. The court officials were concerned about future successions. If one of his father’s sons gave his father the first grandson then it would affect which prince the court officials would support.

‘I have never been involved in their battles for the throne yet they won’t let me be,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Then why don’t you battle?’ Bei Dou asked. ‘You suit the throne more than them.’

‘Bei Dou, you don’t need to keep persuading me to change my plan,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I know you want to avenge your family. When there is the right opportunity I’ll help you avenge your family. But now isn’t the right opportunity, you need to be patient and not do anything reckless. Also, I want to remind you that I only want to be a carefree prince.’

Pei Jin strode out of Bei Dou’s chamber. Bei Dou glanced at Pei Jin’s back and he felt a little disappointed.

Bei Dou remembered his promise to Pei Jin five years ago.

‘I can save you but you need to promise me not to recklessly avenge your family,’ Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou promised Pei Jin to stay alive. He followed Pei Jin for five years and for five years he tried to persuade Pei Jin to fight for the throne. But Pei Jin’s reply was always the same, ‘I have no desire to be emperor.’

While Bei Dou was wondering if Pei Jin truly had no desire to be emperor, Pei Jin was looking for Yan Shi Ning.

Half way to his and Yan Shi Ning’s chamber, he saw her hiding behind a fake rock mountain and waving a fan. He didn’t know who she was spying on.

Earlier Yan Shi Ning had changed into a comfortable dress then she took a stroll around the gardens. But she didn't expect to accidentally see Su Yue pulled a young maid between twelve and thirteen years old to a fake rock mountain.

'Little vixen, I'll let you grow a new face,' Su Yue threatened.

Yan Shi Ning loved to watch lively performances. In the two years she lived at the Yan Manor she almost died of the Yan Manor's dullness. Of course she wouldn't let go of a lively performance and secretly followed Su Yue and the young maid.

Yan Shi Ning eavesdropped on Su Yue and the young maid and understood what happened between them. In the morning the young maid followed Pei Jin's order and cooked chicken soup. Then in the afternoon Su Yue sneaked into the kitchen and ate a portion of the chicken soup. The young maid returned to the kitchen and caught Su Yue eating the chicken soup and scolded Su Yue that Pei Jin said the chicken soup was for Yan Shi Ning. Su Yue waited for no witnesses to bully the young maid for daring to scold Su Yue.

Su Yue cursed and hit the young maid. 'The moment you saw ninth prince's wife enter the manor, you want to gain his wife's favour. You're wasting your energy. She's only a poor unloved little girl inside the prime minister's manor. Ninth prince only married her because he was forced. What does it matter if I eat chicken soup? Do you think ninth prince would hit or curse me? Open your eyes wide or I'll force you to see properly!'

Su Yue slapped the young maid's cheek. Su Yue's fingernails were long and sharp. Yan Shi Ning couldn't see clearly if Su Yue accidentally or purposely scratched the young maid's cheek, but a little blood dripped down the young maid's cheek. The young maid cried out in pain and tears flowed down her cheeks.

Su Yue wasn't satisfied enough and kicked the young maid's body until the young maid fell on the ground.

Su Yue left the young maid crying on the ground. After a while the young maid struggled to get off the ground and left the fake rock mountain.

Yan Shi Ning slipped and was surprised she fell back into Pei Jin's chest instead of the ground.

‘Big brother, what are you doing here?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I came to see the lively performance too,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I thought you would ask for justice on behalf of the young maid.’

Pei Jin thought Yan Shi Ning would jump into the fight and slap both of Su Yue’s cheeks to avenge the young maid.

‘I remember someone said Su Yue has a special background,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If I reprimand her then it would cause trouble for someone.’

Pei Jin was initially surprised Yan Shi Ning held back in consideration of him. But he realised the Yan Shi Ning he knew would think of a way to discreetly deal with Su Yue.

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End of Chapter Nine (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***



# Ten



## Chapter Ten

In the evening Pei Jin wrote letters to his elders in Southern Jiang.

While Pei Jin was writing the letters, he remembered Yan Shi Ning eating fish soup and smiling coldly at Su Yue.

After Pei Jin sealed the letters, he rushed from the calligraphy room to their chamber. Yan Shi Ning was sitting hunched back on the bed but the moment she saw him, she sat upright.

Suddenly Pei Jin flew to the bed and hugged Yan Shi Ning.

‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Pei Jin began to take off Yan Shi Ning’s outer robe. ‘What are you thinking about?’

Yan Shi Ning looked suspiciously at Pei Jin and she struggled to keep her clothes on. ‘Big brother, last night didn’t you say you wouldn’t force me if I wasn’t willing?’

Pei Jin quickly took off Yan Shi Ning’s outer and inner robes. He had wanted to



take off her undergarments too, but worried he couldn't control his desire.

Yan Shi Ning sat in the corner of the bed, covered her chest and Pei Jin laughed.

‘Wife, you don't need to be weary,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I was worried you would feel hot sleeping with your clothes on so I helped you take them off. If you don't want me to take off your clothes then in the future don't wear clothes to bed.’

Pei Jin took off his clothes and laid on the bed next to Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning watched Pei Jin lying on the bed for a while. Since his arms and legs didn't wander, she uncovered her chest and laid on the bed far away from him.

Pei Jin rolled over and pulled Yan Shi Ning into his chest.

A while later a frustrated Pei Jin let go of Yan Shi Ning. Why did his little brother react when he was only hugging her? He needed a diversion to distract his little brother.

‘Wife, why were you staring at Su Yue during the afternoon meal?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Ninth prince, you're not going to let me even look at her? You must deeply love her.’

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning's cheek. ‘Why does the chamber smell sour?’

Yan Shi Ning sniffed and coughed. ‘Ninth prince didn't bathe so the chamber smells sour.’

‘Are you being honest?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘Your husband is clean, if you don't believe then you can smell me.’

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning closer for her face to touch his chest.

Yan Shi Ning pushed Pei Jin's chest and pulled her face away from his chest. It gave him a clear view of her snow white neck. His whole body stiffened and his heart burned intensely.

Pei Jin lowered his head and bit Yan Shi Ning's neck. Initially he wanted to kiss her neck gently but the moment his lips touched her soft skin, he couldn't

control himself.

Yan Shi Ning's neck ached and felt tingly. A strange feeling stirred in her heart. But the strange feeling was replaced by panic after Pei Jin's hands slid beneath her undergarments.

Yan Shi Ning's attempt to stop Pei Jin's hands wandering was pointless. He was too familiar with the sensitive spots on her body. His hands rubbed her two hard peaks.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's hot hands rubbed the most sensitive spots on her body and immediately her face felt like it was lit on fire.

Pei Jin berated himself for losing his usual self-control each time he touched Yan Shi Ning, but he didn't want to be forced to let her go.

Pei Jin's hands slowly rubbed Yan Shi Ning's body like it was a fragile treasure. His lips lingered on her neck for a while. Then his lips moved to her earlobe, her cheek and finally to her lips. But he didn't dare to taste her lips for too long, his little brother hardened like metal. He decided he wouldn't prolong his suffering and promised his little brother he would let her go after one more kiss. Suddenly he heard an agonizing moan escape from her lips. His head moved slightly back and he saw her face flushed red and her swollen lips pursed.

Pei Jin smiled. 'Wife, what are you dreaming about?'

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin's satisfied smile, it made her both shy and angry. She bit his hand and rolled over but her face felt hotter. A moment ago she thought her body was going to explode.

Pei Jin didn't dare touch Yan Shi Ning again. He stared at a corner of the bed and suffered in silence for a long time.

The night air cooled, Pei Jin pulled the blanket over Yan Shi Ning's body. She felt like an animal offering, turned to face him and her glare warned him, 'if big brother dare to come close to me, I'll bite you to death.'

Pei Jin laughed. 'Wife, don't worry. I truly won't touch you. But rubbing your chest is a good deed. Your chest is too small, it needs to be rubbed to grow bigger.'

Yan Shi Ning was angry enough to be speechless for a while.

‘Big brother, rub your chest to grow bigger first!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning rolled over so Pei Jin couldn’t rub her chest.

‘Wife, are you thinking about how to deal with Su Yue?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Big brother, wouldn’t it break your heart?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘What break heart?’ Pei Jin said. ‘As long as you’re happy.’

Yan Shi Ning turned her head to face Pei Jin and thought he looked sincere.

‘I haven’t thought of a way yet,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin smiled. ‘If you need my help, you can open your mouth.’

Pei Jin closed his eyes and feigned sleep. But Yan Shi Ning stayed awake and thought about a memory from years ago.

Yan Shi Ning remembered the day she was bullied and on her way home she bumped into Pei Jin. Usually if she saw him she would immediately flee. So she pretended she didn’t see him and walked past him, but he stopped her.

‘Little lion, were you bullied?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Has no relation to you,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Do you want me to help you take revenge?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin’s tall body and told him about the boy who bullied her.

Pei Jin woke Yan Shi Ning up early the next day, he helped her build a trap and they waited for the boy who bullied her to walk home from school.

The boy stepped on the trap and released a bag of dirt and rotted food attached on a branch. Stinky cabbage leaves, weed, sand and pebbles fell on top of the boy’s head.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t stop herself smiling while remembering the past. At that time she didn’t think the little ninth prince who loved to tease her for his amusement would help her take revenge in that way. She thought he would roll his sleeves and give the boy a beating.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ning remembered what happened after Pei Jin helped her take revenge and cursed the thief. He forced her to pay him for his help. She remembered her head spun and protested why he didn't mention payment before helping her.

'How much do you want?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin smiled and raised three fingers. 'Three copper coins are enough.'

Yan Shi Ning stroked her precious pouch and her heart broke. Her life savings were inside the pouch, two copper coins.

'You don't have enough?' Pei Jin asked. 'It's alright. Then you can repay me by writing in my book the words I'll recite to you from teacher's lessons.'

Yan Shi Ning was forced to write words in Pei Jin's book for several days. The heavens knew at that time she hated calligraphy the most.

Yan Shi Ning struggled to repay Pei Jin. She was happy after she completed writing all the words he recited and thought she could escape the little demon to play. But the little demon was also a mouthy boy.

'Teacher, in the future can Shi Ning stay here to read and write with me?' Pei Jin asked. 'I think little sister is naturally intelligent.'

Yan Shi Ning cried silent tears after Pei Jin's teacher nodded in agreement with the little demon's fake sincere smile.

For a whole year after Pei Jin's teacher was fooled, Yan Shi Ning was woken up early in the morning by the little demon's voice outside her chamber.

'Auntie Dung, is Shi Ning awake?' Pei Jin asked. 'She needs to wake up early to read.'

The pitiful little Yan Shi Ning was dragged out of bed early each morning by her mother and given to Pei Jin. While she read and wrote with Pei Jin, she would glare resentfully at the black stomach mouthy boy.

Yan Shi Ning sighed inwardly, her past was too pitiful and full of suffering. She wanted to cry but she turned her head around, looked at the Pei Jin who was sleeping peacefully and became angry at him for bullying her in the past.

Yan Shi Ning put aside her resentment and thought about how she should deal

with Su Yue.

Pei Jin secretly watched Yan Shi Ning while she was in deep thought. Watching her made him think about the past.

Pei Jin remembered how he fooled Yan Shi Ning into learning how to read and write. She would always check her pouch each day so of course he knew she only had two copper coins. It was her fault for fighting with a boy bigger than her and losing. Teaching her how to read and write was a good deed. Her beautiful calligraphy was the result of his effort in the past. He did bully her, but other people weren't allowed to bully her.

The following morning Pei Jin woke up and saw Yan Shi Ning sat beside him and stared at him with eyes too shiny.

'Wife, what are you looking at?' Pei Jin asked.

'I finally found a way, but I need big brother's help,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin laughed on the inside, Yan Shi Ning must have stayed awake all night thinking.

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End of Chapter Ten

***Related***

# Eleven



## Chapter Eleven

Su Yue awoken early in the morning, looked at the clear sky and thought it was a harmless day.

Su Yue got out of bed quickly, she didn't want Pei Jin to spend too much alone time with Yan Shi Ning. It didn't matter if Pei Jin liked Yan Shi Ning. Of course Pei Jin would like her more, they spent more than three years together in his manor. She remembered during last night's meal, Pei Jin didn't punish her after he heard she ate Yan Shi Ning's chicken soup.

Su Yue puffed her chest triumphantly. She painted her lips red and walked quickly to Pei Jin's chamber.

Unbeknownst to Su Yue, Yan Shi Ning had waited a long time for Su Yue's arrival.

Su Yue entered the chamber and stood close to Pei Jin. 'Ninth prince, let me change your clothes.'

'No, you can help my wife,' Pei Jin said.

'I'm scared your wife will be angry if I help her,' Su Yue insisted.

‘Then you can stand beside my wife and wait for her instructions,’ Pei Jin said and stepped behind the screen to change clothes.

Su Yue quickly followed Pei Jin.

Beside the screen was the vanity table, Yan Shi Ning was brushing her hair.

Su Yue saw Yan Shi Ning in front of the vanity table and she frowned.

‘Heavens, my stomach hurts,’ Yan Shi Ning said and hunched over. ‘Su Yue, help me stand.’

Yan Shi Ning acted like she was about to fall and she grabbed onto Su Yue’s dress.

Su Yue saw Yan Shi Ning’s pale face, she panicked and hated to be close to Yan Shi Ning. She quickly took a few steps back. Behind her was a raised platform and she lost her balance. She didn’t know when there was a blue vase on the platform.

Pei Jin saw the blue vase wobbled but didn’t fall on the floor. He rushed to Yan Shi Ning and his elbow lightly collided with Su Yue on the way to Yan Shi Ning.

Su Yue knocked over the blue vase and it shattered on the floor.

Su Yue avoided the broken pieces of the blue vase. Her face whitened, the blue vase was a gift from the emperor. It was also Pei Jin’s favorite vase yet she knocked it over.

‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out in pain and hugged her stomach. ‘Su Yue, why didn’t you help me stand?’

Su Yue turned her head to face Yan Shi Ning. Yan Shi Ning had fallen on the floor and Pei Jin was hugging Yan Shi Ning.

‘Su Yue, my wife is in pain, why didn’t you help her stand?’ Pei Jin asked accusingly.

Pei Jin glanced at the broken blue vase and his face darkened. ‘My imperial father gave me the vase you broke.’

Su Yue knelt on the floor and begged for mercy. ‘Ninth prince, I didn’t break it on purpose. Your wife shocked me...’

Su Yue had never seen Pei Jin angry to that extent. He ignored her and carried Yan Shi Ning to the bed.

‘Someone quickly go and bring Gentleman Bei here!’ Pei Jin ordered.

Bei Dou was exercising when he saw a distressed young maid running toward him. He thought something bad happened like the poison in Yan Shi Ning’s body had taken effect and ran to Pei Jin’s chamber.

After Bei Dou examined Yan Shi Ning’s body, her breathing and blood circulation was normal and apart from her pale complexion, her body was healthy. He didn’t understand why he was summoned. He glanced at Pei Jin, Pei Jin’s eyes signalled him to not ask any questions.

‘Your wife’s health isn’t life threatening but she’ll need further examination,’ Bei Dou said cautiously.

Su Yue exhaled. If Yan Shi Ning was seriously ill then she would be severely punished. But she was also disappointed Yan Shi Ning’s health wasn’t life threatening, it’d be better for her if Yan Shi Ning died.

Pei Jin’s body relaxed and he gently patted Yan Shi Ning’s hand. ‘Wife, I’m relieved you’re alright. You scared me to death before.’

‘I’m sorry I worried you,’ Yan Shi Ning said weakly.

Pei Jin comforted Yan Shi Ning for a while. He turned his head and glared at Su Yue. ‘I have never mistreated you or punished anyone in the manor before. But today you past your boundaries excessively. Luckily my wife’s health isn’t life threatening. If something had happened to her, how can you compensate her? You also broke the vase my father gave me! What do you think is the right thing for me to do?’

Su Yue knelt in front Pei Jin, grabbed onto his pants and begged for mercy. ‘Ninth prince, I know it was my fault. Ninth prince, forgive me.’

Bei Dou was disgusted by Su Yue’s behaviour and looked in a different direction.

Yan Shi Ning closed her eyes and acted like she didn’t see anything.

Pei Jin sighed and acted merciful. ‘Considering you have followed me a few



years, I don't have the heart to punish you. You should lock yourself in your chamber for one month to think about what you did wrong.'

Su Yue widened her eyes and panicked. If she was locked in her chamber for a month then Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's bond would grow stronger without her interference.

'You don't need to say anything else, go to your chamber,' Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou, Su Yue and the other maids left the chamber.

Pei Jin laughed and laid on the bed next to Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, are you satisfied with my performance?'

Yan Shi Ning rolled over to avoid Pei Jin's hug and she put the pillow between them. 'Of course, you're an expert liar.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered Pei Jin's crestfallen face when she fell on the floor, his anger while scolding Su Yue and his feigned reluctance to punish Su Yue. If Yan Shi Ning didn't know he followed her plan then she would have believed he was sincere.

'Expert liar,' Yan Shi Ning praised.

'We're the same,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning knew it was her plan and she couldn't curse Pei Jin for following her plan.

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning's cheek while she was distracted. 'Go wash the white powder off your face. Putting a thick layer on your face isn't good for your skin.'

Pei Jin's prompt reminded Yan Shi Ning about her face. She quickly got out of bed and washed her face. She smiled while remembering the panic in Su Yue's eyes when Su Yue saw her ghostly pale face from the thick layer of white powder she put on her face.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the platform and rushed back to the bed. 'Big brother, I ask you to choose an ordinary item to break. Why did you choose the vase the emperor gave you? It's a pity to break an expensive vase.'

'The main part of a good performance is to make it believable,' Pei Jin said. 'If I

don't choose something valuable then how can I summon deep emotions?'

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Jin's indifferent tone and she didn't understand why he didn't care about the vase the emperor gave him. Judging by Su Yue's reaction after seeing the broken vase, it meant the vase must have been significant yet Pei Jin didn't care.

Yan Shi Ning looked suspiciously at Pei Jin, but he draped an arm over his face and she couldn't see his expression clearly.

Yan Shi Ning reflected on her plan. She would pretend she had a stomach ache and ask Su Yue to help her stand. If Su Yue had helped her stand then nothing bad would have happened. But if Su Yue didn't help her then Su Yue would step back to avoid her, knock over the vase and be forced to accept punishment. She gave Su Yue a chance to show Su Yue's compassionate side, it was a shame Su Yue didn't value it. But Su Yue's reaction didn't disappoint her, Su Yue chose not to help her like she predicted.

Yan Shi Ning felt it was a pity she had to involve Pei Jin in her plan. She needed him to contribute a suitable item to be sacrificed and cooperate with her for a believable performance.

Initially Yan Shi Ning had doubts, she thought Pei Jin truly loved Su Yue and only pretended to keep his distance with Su Yue in front of her. When he said Su Yue had a 'special background,' she was worried if she reprimanded Su Yue it would cause him trouble, which was why she had to think deeply for a discreet plan. But she didn't expect him to be agreeable and praised her plan, 'Wife, I'll use all my capabilities to cooperate with you.'

Indeed Pei Jin kept his promise to Yan Shi Ning and cooperated excessively with her to not give Su Yue a chance to evade punishment.

Yan Shi Nang held a wash cloth and dried her face. 'Big brother, I only intended to scare her a little. Why did you punish her severely by isolating her in her chamber for a month?'

'Wife, isn't it you who didn't want to see her face?' Pei Jin asked. 'Of course your husband has to grant your request.'

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Jin licked his lips, she acted disgusted and looked in a

different direction. But when he couldn't see her face, she smiled. 'Is that so? Big brother, then it appears you chose a light punishment for her. Your heart doesn't want to part with her permanently.'

Pei Jin stood, put on his outer robe and spoke in a fake regretful tone. 'Everyone knows me as gentle ninth prince. Of course a gentle ninth prince needs to be merciful.'

Yan Shi Ning quietly glared at Pei Jin for a while. She picked up her fan and she walked outside. She realised he was someone who never forgets to wear his mask tightly in front of other people.

Pei Jin picked up the half eaten jujube that Yan Shi Ning didn't finish eating, ate it and followed her outside. He smiled and purposely didn't tell her that he had been planning of a way to force Su Yue outside his manor for a long time, because he wanted her to believe she owed him a favor.

'Little lion, you haven't paid me for helping you,' Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning's body tensed and she stood still. 'Big brother, what do you want?'

Pei Jin stood beside Yan Shi Ning, kissed her cheek and whispered in her ear. 'I want you.'

Yan Shi Ning was speechless for a while before she aimed a kick in the direction of the scoundrel's leg.

Suddenly a little boy ran to them. 'Ninth prince, mistress, the palace delivered chests to the manor.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning returned to their chamber and they opened the chests. She was surprised and suspicious why the emperor sent chests of silk fabrics, expensive jewellery and makeup.

Pei Jin expected his father would give those kind of gifts to Yan Shi Ning. He remembered his father's embarrassment when someone insulted the way Yan Shi Ning dressed. Of course his father would give Yan Shi Ning beautiful clothes and jewellery to prevent other people from insulting his father's family members. Also for his father to fool others that he wasn't mistreated and warn other people that no one was allowed to look down on any of his father's sons.

Pei Jin hid his disgust and smiled warmly at Yan Shi Ning. ‘Imperial father loves you, you can accept his gifts.’

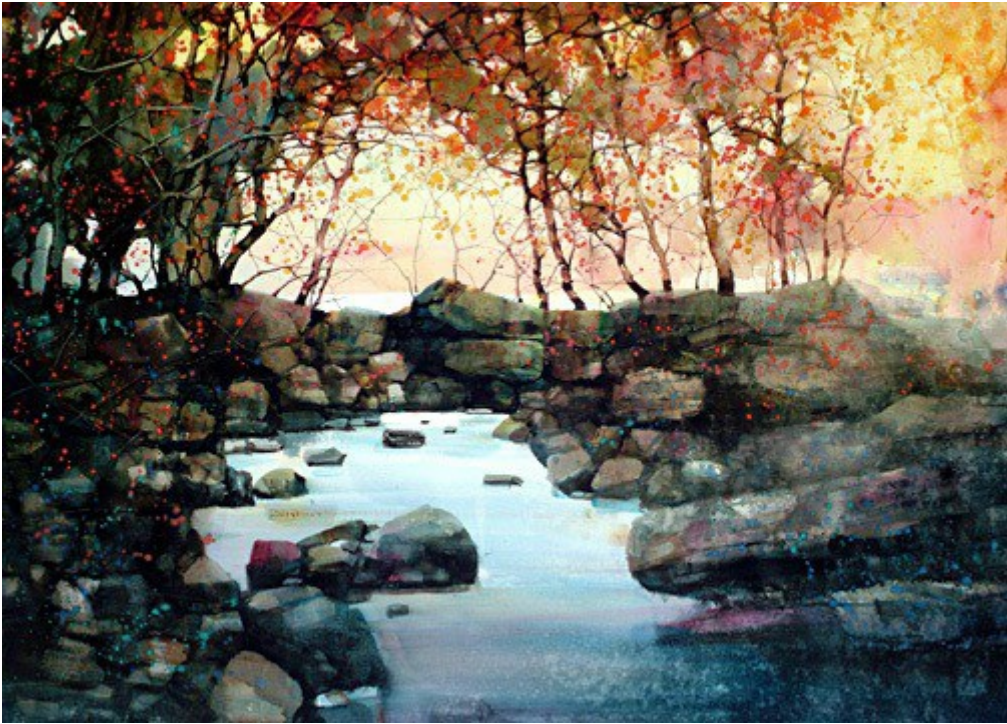
Yan Shi Ning peered closely at Pei Jin’s face for a while. ‘Big brother, do you want to fool a dead person?’

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End of Chapter Eleven

***Related***

## part 1



### Chapter Twelve (Part 1)

Su Yue locked herself in her chamber for a day.

Su Yue felt it was cruel of Pei Jin to punish her to stay in her chamber for a month. She needed to get him to change his decision.

The night sky darkened, Su Yue picked up a lantern and stepped to the vanity table.

Su Yue pulled the drawer of the vanity table and took out a small chest. Inside it was one white bottle and one blue bottle. She picked up the blue bottle and she was tempted to use it. But she put the blue bottle down, picked up the white bottle and hid the chest inside the drawer.

Pei Jin was reading letters he received from his elders and army comrades in Southern Jiang in the calligraphy room. He laughed while reading the list of reasons they wanted him to return to Southern Jiang. They complained the general made everyone eat vegetarian food and didn't allow them to watch performances. Suddenly he heard a loud sob outside the door.

'Let me in,' Su Yue said. 'I want to see ninth prince.'

Pei Jin frowned. He hid the letters and stepped toward the door. But before he

reached the door, Su Yu barged into the room.

The night cooled but Su Yue wore a thin white dress and thick makeup. Pei Jin was angry on the inside, Su Yue was supposed to reflect on her bad behaviour in her chamber. Why did she leave her chamber and came running to the calligraphy room? What a troublesome person!

Su Yue put a tray of food on a table, knelt in front of Pei Jin, held onto his leg and she sobbed loudly. 'Ninth prince, I know I was wrong. Ninth prince, forgive me. I don't dare to commit another wrong. I promise in the future I'll serve you and your wife well.'

Pei Jin's heart remembered Yan Shi Ning, it tempted him to follow Yan Shi Ning's lead and kick. But he was supposed to be gentle ninth prince. He pulled his leg free and stood away from Su Yue.

'Stand up and speak,' Pei Jin said.

'No, if ninth prince won't forgive me then I won't stand,' Su Yue said and looked pitifully at Pei Jin.

Su Yue refused to stand up and Pei Jin spoke in a colder tone. 'Su Yue, don't forget your status!'

'Status?' Su Yue asked. 'Ninth prince, what is my status? When court official Huang Guo gave me to you, did you forget what he said to you? In the past I wanted to serve you but you always refused. You said I was too young then you said you were heartbroken over Lady Yewu. Later you said you were busy with duties to let me serve you. But now I'm eighteen years old and you have a wife. Other people think that I'm your woman, but that's not the truth. Ninth prince, what is my status?'

Pei Jin didn't want to see Su Yue's pitiful face and turned around. He knew he needed to act merciful but in that moment it was hard for him to act merciful. He could only turn around to not show Su Yue how much she repulsed him.

Pei Jin's silence made Su Yue panicked. She thought for a day to think carefully of what to say to him. She remembered he was always gentle. She thought he would pity her, hug her and comfort her like a precious jewel. In the past he wasn't close to women. Since he had a wife, she thought he wanted to eat her

but felt he couldn't. But she didn't expect him to react coldly. She didn't know what she did wrong.

Su Yue's plan to act pitiful didn't work so she quickly changed tactics.

Su Yue stood, picked up a bowl of soup and passed it to Pei Jin. 'Even though ninth prince never glanced at me once, I don't resent you. I'm happy to be beside you. Forgive me for my behaviour before. I couldn't control myself. My heart was scared thinking about a month of not serving you... I made you a bowl of soup that you love most. If you drink it, it means you forgive me. Then I'll obediently think about my behaviour and I won't misbehave again.'

Pei Jin stared at the bowl of soup in front of him. He hesitated, but he accepted it and drank a sip. He reasoned although Su Yue was sent by Huang Guo, he was certain Su Yue wouldn't poison him so he planned to drink it then order her to leave.

Su Yue's heart relaxed after Pei Jin drank all of the soup. She slowly tidied the table and glanced often at Pei Jin.

Pei Jin ignored Su Yue, sat at the table and read books. Suddenly he felt something strange. Why were the words dancing on the pages of the books?

'What did you put in the soup?' Pei Jin asked coldly.

Pei Jin felt his little brother surfaced and he fisted his hands.

Pei Jin felt his body weakened except for his little brother's fire. He glared at Su Yu who was pulling him to the bed. She took off his outer robe, he wanted to stop her but he couldn't in a weak state. No! He wasn't going to let her control him.

Pei Jin struggled to breathe, bit his tongue and his head cleared a little. He temporarily regained his strength, pushed Su Yue and he rushed outside.

Yan Shi Ning washed her face, brushed her hair and climbed onto the bed. Suddenly she heard the door banged open. It startled her but Pei Jin's disorientated state startled her more.

'Big brother, what happened?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

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End of Chapter Twelve (Part 1)

***Related***



## part 2



### Chapter Twelve (Part 2 of 2)

Pei Jin's clothes were disorderly.

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Jin breathed heavily, his eyes were red and he gave off a crazy wild animal aura.

Pei Jin staggered onto the bed, hugged Yan Shi Ning and spoke huskily. 'Su Yue put lust herbs in my soup.'

'What-' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin laid on top of Yan Shi Ning and kissed her. She felt something hard pressed against her stomach and her body tensed in anticipation. Was she going to experience a wedding night?

Yan Shi Ning's heart was chaotic. Pei Jin's lips left her lips and his hands loosened the grip on her waist.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and he smiled. 'Wife, don't worry. I promised if you're not willing then I won't force you. I can control the lust herbs effect.'

Pei Jin let go of Yan Shi Ning and he laid on the bed. Her heart ached because of the clear suffering on his face.

‘Big brother, why did Su Yue put lust herbs in your soup?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning to his chest. ‘Huang Guo sent her to be my maid and spy on me. He wanted her to become one of my consorts, but I have never touched her. Today she was punished to stay in her chamber to reflect. She panicked and wanted to turn rice grains into steamed rice.’

After Pei Jin opened his mouth, he couldn’t control himself and kissed Yan Shi Ning’s lips again. His hands swiftly took off her clothes and untied her undergarments. His hands didn’t resist touching her soft skin and pink peaks.

Yan Shi Ning gasped for air and pushed Pei Jin away. ‘Big brother, if she’s responsible for giving you lust herbs then big brother should let her serve you.’

Pei Jin bit Yan Shi Ning’s lips hard and heard her moan of pain but her breathing quickened.

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning’s flushed face, crinkled forehead and kissed her deeply. ‘Wife, I only want you. I don’t want anyone else.’

Yan Shi Ning heard the conviction in Pei Jin’s tone, her ears reddened and she felt her soul floating away.

‘But I know you’re not willing,’ Pei Jin said and let Yan Shi Ning go. ‘Tonight I’ll endure.’

Yan Shi Ning looked at the strain on Pei Jin’s face and she felt guilty for making him endure. She reasoned they were married and sleeping with him was fated by the heavens. There was no need for her to deprive him and for him to suffer.

‘Big brother... you don’t need to endure anymore...’ Yan Shi Ning whispered.

Pei Jin lowered his head so Yan Shi Ning couldn’t see his devious smile. He raised his head, looked at her with pained eyes and he spoke in a hoarse voice. ‘No, Shi Ning, I can endure.’

Yan Shi Ning’s body trembled in admiration. She thought if Pei Jin heard her consent then he would immediately jump on her body, she didn’t expect him to force himself to be a gentleman.

Yan Shi Ning's impression of Pei Jin improved greatly in her heart, it appeared he was a good person. She silently vowed in the future she wouldn't kick him anymore.

Pei Jin endured his frustrations. Of course he could easily ingest a pill to counteract the effect of lust herbs and didn't need to torment himself. But he saw the softness in Yan Shi Ning's eyes and his eyes brightened, his frustrations bear fruit.

That night Pei Jin rolled on the bed and mumbled countless while his hands continuously wandered on Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Finally the effect of the lust herbs have worn off.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered how Pei Jin endured throughout the night so she didn't protest that his hands wandered everywhere on her body.

In the calligraphy room Su Yue's heart withered. She couldn't believe even under the influence of lust herbs Pei Jin didn't want to touch her.

The following morning Pei Jin awoken early. He stared at Yan Shi Ning who was sleeping on his chest and he smiled like a scoundrel.

A while later Pei Jin's eyes darkened coldly. He couldn't allow to let Su Yue stay in his manor anymore! But Su Yue was given to him by Huang Guo, he needed a good reason to return Su Yue that wouldn't offend Huang Guo. His head were full of thoughts of how to return Su Yue in a way that Huang Guo was forced to accept.

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End of Chapter Twelve (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Thirteen



## Chapter Thirteen

Yan Shi Ning didn't want to get out of bed.

Yan Shi Ning buried her head on Pei Jin's chest. But he kept poking her to wake up. She raised her head, glared at him, rolled over and continued to sleep.

Pei Jin shook Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Wife, wake up.'

Yan Shi Ning frowned and kept her eyes closed.

Pei Jin smiled. 'You need to wake up to read.'

'Troublemaker!' Yan Shi Ning protested.

Pei Jin laughed and shook Yan Shi Ning's body but she continued to sleep.

'Wife, you have no conscience,' Pei Jin accused. 'Someone schemed against your husband, but you can sleep peacefully.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered what happened last night and had no sympathy left for Pei Jin. 'You deserve it.'

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin always deceived other people, of course it was fair he received retribution.

Pei Jin rubbed his chin. 'Wife, how should I deal with her?'

'Feeding her master lust herbs is a serious offence,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Of course you need to punish her severely.'

'Wife, it appears you truly hate her,' Pei Jin said. 'If that is so then your husband won't be merciful anymore. I've decided to make her disappear forever in front of us.'

Yan Shi Ning's eyes widened and she sat upright on the bed. 'Big brother, you don't want to...'

Yan Shi Ning gestured a slit throat.

'Wife, what are you thinking?' Pei Jin asked. 'I want her to go back to Huang Guo's manor.'

Yan Shi Ning's heart cursed Pei Jin, it was pointless of him to appear deadly threatening before if he didn't want to kill Su Yue.

'But I need a good reason to send her back,' Pei Jin said. 'Faulting her for feeding me lust herbs isn't a good reason. She was given to me to serve me. Huang Guo would ask me to forgive her for being impatient to serve me.'

'Big brother, what do you want to do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'I have a plan...' Pei Jin said. 'Yesterday I cooperated with you. Today I need your help.'

Yan Shi Ning listened to Pei Jin's plan. 'Big brother, you thought deeply only to return one maid to Huang Guo's manor?'

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and he smiled. 'Wife, are you not the one who hates her? Because of your happiness, your husband would do anything.'

'Big brother, why does it feel like you want to borrow a dagger to kill someone?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin didn't admit or deny Yan Shi Ning's accusation. 'Wife, will you let me borrow your dagger or not?'

Yan Shi Ning pursed her lips, contemplated for a while and agreed to help Pei Jin. But she was suspicious why he would waste energy to think of a thorough plan to send Su Yue back to Huang Guo's manor unless he had his own reason. She sighed inwardly. Although she was curious what the reason was, she knew if he didn't want to tell her then it was pointless to ask him.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at Pei Jin who was smiling too sweetly and her intuition agreed with her suspicions. 'Big brother, have you been wanting to chase Su Yue out of your manor for a long time?'

Pei Jin's sweet smile didn't disappear. If he didn't deny it, Yan Shi Ning knew last night she was fooled. She glared at him, raised her foot and kicked his thigh. MF, fooled her again!

Initially Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin agreed to cooperate with her to punish Su Yue because he wanted to appease her. After she thought carefully, she realised he had fooled her.

Pei Jin was happy Yan Shi Ning was angry. He hugged her and his hands stroked her skin beneath her undergarments. She didn't struggle and only laid still. He rubbed his face on her neck and bribed her. 'Wife, don't you want to know why I want to chase Su Yue out of the manor?'

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin and he whispered in her ear. 'Huang Guo truly gave Su Yue to me to spy on me.'

Yan Shi Ning's body shivered. After Consort Chen died, Huang Guo resigned from his position in the imperial court. Huang Guo announced he wanted to live a peaceful life of a gardener. Yan Shi Ning didn't understand why Huang Guo wanted to spy on Pei Jin. Perhaps, it was seventh prince or the crown prince who wanted to spy on Pei Jin.

Pei Jin could see Yan Shi Ning's flow of thoughts and he whispered something in her ear.

Su Yue stayed awake most of the night. The more she thought, the more heartbroken and hopeless she felt. She stayed in bed and hugged her pillow the whole morning. But in the afternoon she couldn't stay in bed quietly, because she heard Pei Jin's voice nearby her chamber.



‘Wife, what do you think of these flowers?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘The flowers are beautiful,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘It reminds of Su Yue, they’re all beautiful. Who lives in the chamber of this courtyard? It’s a beautiful courtyard.’

‘Mistress, big sister Su lives here,’ a maid said.

‘Is that so?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Ninth prince, a day’s gone. If you were angry then it would have simmered by now. I feel I was partly at fault, Su Yue was shocked to see me sick and accidentally knocked over the blue vase... I think that she doesn’t need to reflect for a month in her chamber.’

Su Yue was eavesdropping by her chamber window. Her heart raged and thought Yan Shi Ning was pretending to appear merciful in front of Pei Jin. She hated Yan Shi Ning but she wanted to hear Pei Jin’s reply. She didn’t expect he would forgive her after what she did last night.

‘Wife, if that is your wish then Su Yue’s punishment can be forgotten,’ Pei Jin said.

Su Yue was overjoyed to hear Pei Jin had forgiven her.

‘Ninth prince, let’s go visit Su Yue,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Su Yue quickly adjusted her dress and hair. She curtsied when Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning entered her chamber.

Yan Shi Ning said some comforting words to Su Yue, but Su Yue’s attention was focused on Pei Jin’s coldness toward her.

‘If my wife has forgiven you,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I have nothing more to say. In the future you need to serve my wife well!’

Su Yue’s blood boiled at the thought of serving Yan Shi Ning. ‘Thank you ninth prince. Thank you mistress.’

Su Yue was happy to be free from her chamber, it gave her opportunities to separate Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning suggested Su Yue should rest for a few days. But Su Yue declined, tidied her chamber and followed Yan Shi Ning.

In Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s chamber, Yan Shi Ning was playing with a maid’s

cat. Pei Jin sat next to Yan Shi Ning while reading a book. Apart from the cat's meow sounds, it was quiet in their chamber.

'Ninth prince, I wonder if the herbal soup is ready,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I feel a little hungry.'

'Then send someone to the kitchen,' Pei Jin said and glanced at Su Yue.

Su Yue understood and immediately walked to the kitchen nearby. The herbal soup was cooked and she scooped a bowl of herbal soup. The steam rose to her face and her head was consumed with one bad thought.

Yan Shi Ning waited for the herbal soup for a long time. She acted excited when the bowl of herbal soup was put on the table in front of her.

'Ninth prince, do you want to eat a spoon of the herbal soup?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'No,' Pei Jin said. 'Wife, you can slowly eat the herbal soup.'

Su Yue resented Pei Jin's consideration toward Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning blew on a spoon of herbal soup. It was still hot, she put the bowl of herbal soup back on the table and waited for it to cool. Afterward she continued to play with the cat. She acted like her back ached from patting the cat. Then she put the cat on the table, took out a loose silver hairpin and put it on the table to brush her hair.

Suddenly the cat leapt off the table and knocked over the bowl of herbal soup onto the silver hairpin. Everyone looked shocked to see the silver hairpin changed colour.

'The herbal soup is poisoned!' Yan Shi Ning cried out.

If the herbal soup was poisoned the suspects were the cooks and Su Yue who brought the bowl of herbal soup to Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin's guards and Bei Dou searched the cooks and Su Yue's chambers. The guards found a blue bottle of poison in Su Yue's chamber and Su Yue's face whitened.

Pei Jin passed the blue bottle to Bei Dou.



‘What kind of poison is it?’ Pei Jin asked coldly.

Bei Dou sniffed the blue bottle for a while. ‘This poison is called Diao Jing Ji. Like its name, it prevents pregnancy. If someone ingest this poison then they’ll be infertile for the rest of their life.’

Su Yue panicked and feared for her soul. She knelt in front of Pei Jin and grabbed his sleeve. ‘It isn’t mine! I was framed!’

Pei Jin pulled his sleeve out of Su Yue’s hands.

‘I thought you were remorseful about your impulsiveness,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I didn’t expect that you’re a cruel person!’

‘Ninth prince, it truly isn’t me!’ Su Yue pleaded. ‘Someone framed me!’

‘Who would frame you?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘It’s...’ Su Yue said.

Su Yue couldn’t think of anyone who would frame her. The herbal soup was made by the head cook Xiao Xuan who was a good person and wouldn’t harm anyone. Pei Jin sent her to the kitchen to bring the herbal soup to Yan Shi Ning, but Pei Jin wouldn’t poison Yan Shi Ning.

Su Yue didn’t know what happened. She remembered in the kitchen she did think about poisoning Yan Shi Ning, her arms and legs turned cold. The biggest obstacle between her and Pei Jin would disappear if Yan Shi Ning died.

Su Yue thought about going to her chamber and using the hidden poison to put in the herbal soup. If Yan Shi Ning died then she would deny the deed. She began to suspect herself. That she didn’t think about poisoning the herbal soup but actually did use the poison in her jealous haze.

‘Where did you get the Diao Jing Ji from?’ Pei Jin asked coldly.

Su Yue looked at the bottle but she couldn’t open her mouth. The bottle was secretly delivered to her a month ago from Huang Guo’s manor.

Su Yue remembered what the messenger said before leaving, ‘There’s poison inside this bottle. You need to hide it well. Later I’ll give you instructions when to use it.’

Su Yue never knew the poison was Diao Jing Ji, she only thought it was a deadly poison. But she couldn't reveal the truth if she wanted to stay alive.

Since Su Yue remained silent, it meant she admitted her deed.

'I considered your years of service and forgave you for yesterday's offence,' Pei Jin said. 'Today you dared to do this. I can no longer keep you in this manor. Go pack your belongings and return to Huang Guo's manor!'

Su Yue felt like Pei Jin's words were like a basin of cold water that was poured onto the top of her head and down to her feet.

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End of Chapter Thirteen

***Related***

# Fourteen



## Chapter Fourteen

Su Yue was banished from Pei Jin's manor.

Yan Shi Ning reflected on Pei Jin's plan and she frowned. She followed his plan but he gave her a surprise. Indeed he asked Su Yue to bring a bowl of herbal soup to her. As planned there was no poison in the herbal soup, but there was a poison powder in her fingernails. When she was blowing on the spoon of herbal soup, she slipped the poison into the bowl to frame Su Yue. What she didn't expect was that the same poison was found in Su Yue's chamber.

The poison in Yan Shi Ning's hand was given to her by Pei Jin. After Bei Dou examined the poison found in Su Yue's chamber it was the same poison as the poison Pei Jin gave her. Initially she thought Pei Jin framed Su Yue by putting the bottle of poison in Su Yue's chamber. But she saw Su Yue's guilty expression and she realised the poison did belong to Su Yue. She suspected that Pei Jin knew

long ago that Su Yue hid poison in Su Yue's chamber. That meant someone wanted to harm Pei Jin and Pei Jin used his enemy's poison to deflect his enemy's scheme. She was impressed by how calculating Pei Jin could be.

Yan Shi Ning wasn't certain if Su Yue's poison was intended to harm her or Pei Jin. Also, she didn't know if Su Yue bought the poison on her own or someone secretly gave it to Su Yue. Perhaps someone at Huang Guo's manor was involved.

Yan Shi Ning remembered what Pei Jin whispered in her ear and her heart stirred immensely.

After the maids left the chamber, Pei Jin held her wrists.

'Big brother, what are you doing?' Yan Shi Ning asked and failed to free her wrists.

Pei Jin waved a small scissors in front of Yan Shi Ning. 'Cutting your fingernails. It's too dangerous to keep the poison in your fingernails for a long time.'

In the past Yan Shi Ning hated having long fingernails and kept her fingernails short. But after she entered the Yan Manor, Yan Shi Ting criticized her fingernails were ugly so she kept them long.

Yan Shi Ning wasn't depressed Pei Jin was cutting her fingernails. But a strange feeling stirred in her heart while Pei Jin was holding her hands and cutting her fingernails.

Pei Jin wasn't satisfied to only cut Yan Shi Ning's fingernails. He dipped her hands in a basin of warm water.

'Big brother, there was only a little poison in my fingernails,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'You already cut my fingernails, there's no need to soak my hands.'

'It's an extra precaution,' Pei Jin said. 'What if you accidentally put it in your mouth? What am I going to do if I lose little lion?'

Yan Shi Ning played dead.

After a long time Yan Shi Ning picked up a fan and she sat down at a table.

'When did you start taking a fan with you everywhere you go?' Pei Jin asked. 'It's cooler now.'

A fan had many purposes. A fan was pleasant to look at, it hid Yan Shi Ning's mouth when she was eating snacks or yawning. If she wanted to act vibrant and youthful she used it to chase butterflies. If it was a hot day she would use it to cool her body, it also shielded her from sunlight and rain. Yan Shi Ning had borrowed her fan to hide blood stains on Yan Shi Ting's dress.

The main purpose Yan Shi Ning carried a fan everywhere she went since she arrived in the imperial city was to appear like a lady. But she couldn't let Pei Jin know the real reason.

'Ninth prince, don't you have something to explain to me?' Yan Shi Ning asked to deflect Pei Jin's question.

Pei Jin sat beside Yan Shi Ning and he picked up a cup of tea. 'Wife, what do you want to know?'

'Ninth prince, how did you know there was poison in Su Yue's chamber?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin drank a sip of tea and sighed. 'It appears there are some things I can't fool my wife.'

Yan Shi Ning tapped her fingers impatiently for Pei Jin to explain.

Pei Jin put the cup down. 'If your husband doesn't know what everyone is hiding in their chambers then your husband would have reincarnated long ago.'

Pei Jin spoke in a teasing tone, but Yan Shi Ning understood. Before she married Pei Jin, she knew two dragon princes wanted to sit on the dragon throne. Pei Jin didn't want to be emperor, but he wouldn't escape unscathed. There would be spies sent to Pei Jin's manor, which was why she only showed her real self if she was alone with Pei Jin otherwise she would act like a lady.

Pei Jin's manor looked like a tranquil place, but it was a deadly battlefield. Yan Shi Ning feared in the future she needed to be more cautious.

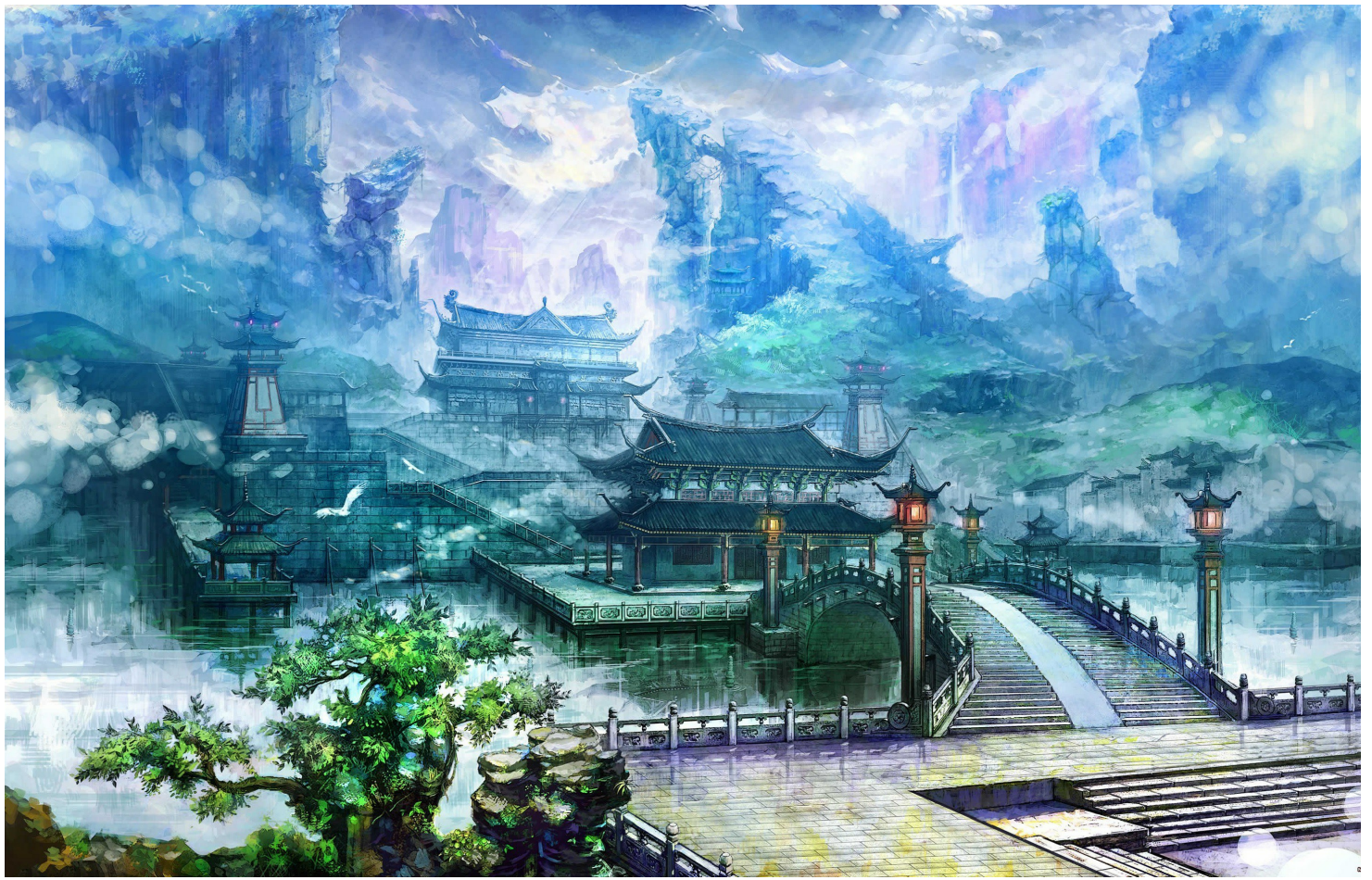
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End of Chapter Fourteen

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**part 1**





## Chapter Fifteen (Part 1)

Yan Shi Ning waved her fan anxiously.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning onto his lap and he whispered in her ear. ‘Wife, you don’t need to worry. My spies have secretly investigated everyone in the manor. Now that Su Yue is gone, you’re free to climb walls or roll on the ground.’

‘Who’s worried?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. Pei Jin reminded her of embarrassing childhood memories and she jumped off his lap. ‘What climb walls? It was you who provoked me to climb walls. What roll on the ground? It was you who forced me to roll on the ground.’

Pei Jin smiled happily at the sight of an angry Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning ran to sit on the chair opposite Pei Jin. She worried pointlessly, Pei Jin had a dangerous stomach and anyone that dared to wrong him was unlucky.

‘Huang Guo’s messenger sent Su Yue the poison,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I asked Bei Dou to check her chamber long ago. In the past I didn’t hesitate to eliminate spies sent to the manor. But she was Huang Guo’s spy... out of consideration Consort Chen was my adoptive mother, I acted like I didn’t know about Su Yue spying on me. I had her followed and I slowly thought of ways to return her without

offending Huang Guo... that was two years ago. After I came back from Southern Jiang I could only avoid her and I waited for the right opportunity to chase her back to Huang Guo's manor.'

'Big brother, how are you going to deal with Huang Guo?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'As long as my wife is happy I'll use all my abilities,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know how Pei Jin could talk nonsense while looking serious.

'Wife, you can see that Huang Guo doesn't want to only spy on me anymore,' Pei Jin said. 'If I didn't deal with Su Yue then I don't know what would have happened to us.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered the bottle of poison and her heart shivered fearfully. 'Big Brother, the poison... is Huang Guo's scheme?'

Pei Jin nodded and Yan Shi Ning took a deep breath. 'But in the morning didn't big brother said Huang Guo... if big brother can't have children then what's the purpose of you climbing high?'

In the morning Pei Jin whispered in Yan Shi Ning's ear, 'Huang Guo always wanted me to climb high, but I don't want to.'

Each time Yan Shi Ning remembered Pei Jin's words, her heart pounded continuously. She thought the battle for the throne was only between seventh prince and crown prince. She didn't know there were court officials who secretly supported Pei Jin. Although Huang Guo resigned, Huang Guo's influence in the imperial court wasn't insignificant.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know why if Huang Guo was secretly supporting Pei Jin then why Huang Guo sent Su Yue to poison Pei Jin.

'Shi Ning, you should know in this world there's something called puppet,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning stayed quiet for a while and thought about the meaning of Pei Jin's words.

Pei Jin smiled at the sight of Yan Shi Ning's revelation expression. He leaned back on his chair and he thought about Consort Chen. When Consort Chen was alive, Huang Guo's desire was for him to become emperor. But Consort Chen



didn't want him to be caught in the deep web of battles. Consort Chen only wanted him to grow into a healthy and carefree man. After Consort Chen died, Huang Guo resigned and to other people it appeared like Huang Guo didn't have any influence left in the imperial court.

When Pei Jin was eighteen years old, Huang Guo asked him, 'who do you think suits being emperor?'

'I don't know,' Pei Jin said.

'What if you are emperor?' Huang Guo asked.

'I don't suit,' Pei Jin said.

'I think you suit more than them,' Huang Guo said.

Huang Guo persuaded some court officials to support Pei Jin, but Pei Jin avoided associations with them.

Yan Shi Ning thought many people who were in Pei Jin's position, a prince who was unloved was suddenly elevated high in the sky would make their heads spin. But Pei Jin wasn't like them. Pei Jin knew the day Huang Guo elevated him high in the sky would also be the day Pei Jin would fall onto the ground, shatter bones and flesh.

Ten years ago Pei Jin hid behind a screen and heard Huang Guo said something cryptic to Consort Chen, 'Boys fight, elders win. Destroy roots, pursue ambition.'

Initially Pei Jin didn't want to believe the meaning behind Huang Guo's words until Bei Dou told him that the poison Huang Guo's messenger gave Su Yue was Diao Jing Ji.

Pei Jin realised the poison was intended for Yan Shi Ning. If Yan Shi Ning couldn't have his children, Huang Guo wanted Su Yue or another woman Huang Guo sent to have his children. Only then would Huang Guo have absolute control while he would be a powerless puppet who could die unexpectedly anytime and Huang Guo would steal the throne.

Pei Jin thought Huang Guo's scheme was good. Luckily he evaded Huang Guo's scheme. He put aside his deep thoughts and saw Yan Shi Ning was standing in front of the window brooding.

‘Wife, what are you thinking about?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning thought about the cruel battles in the palace. But she didn’t expect one day the battles would involve her. If Pei Jin didn’t discover the scheme in time then the consequences would be severe. Heavens, she only entered Pei Jin’s manor for two days and was faced with such a depressing situation.

Yan Shi Ning looked depressingly up at the sky and spoke softly. ‘I’m thinking about my mother’s wish for me to live a safe and carefree life. But I fear I can’t grant her wish.’

Pei Jin stood in front of Yan Shi Ning. ‘Do you regret marrying me? It’s useless to regret now. It’s your fault for not running away before the wedding.’

‘It’s your fault for wanting to marry me!’ Yan Shi Ning said through gritted teeth.

Pei Jin flicked Yan Shi Ning’s forehead. ‘If you didn’t marry me, I fear your chances of living a safe and carefree life would be less.’

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked confusedly.

‘Perhaps this is a hard path,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Are you scared?’

Yan Shi Ning tilted her head back, looked at Pei Jin for a while and spoke in a fierce tone. ‘I’m married to the scariest person in this world. Big brother, do you think there is anything else for me to be scared of?’

Pei Jin laughed.

‘But Huang Guo invested in his scheme for years,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Will he be willing to let go of it?’

Pei Jin looked at the gardens outside the window. ‘Of course not. But right now that’s not the biggest worry.’

‘What else is there?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Tomorrow you need to go to the Yan Manor,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning had forgotten about visiting her maiden family home after the third day of marriage.

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End of Chapter Fifteen (Part 1)

***Related***

**part 2**



## Chapter Fifteen (Part 2)

Pei Jin prepared gifts for Yan Shi Ning's family.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the expensive gifts and her heart ached for the silver taels wasted.

'This is your husband elevating your worth,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning understood if a husband gave expensive gifts to his wife's family, it meant he valued his wife. She knew that she had a high place in Pei Jin's heart. 'Big brother, aren't you scared people will think you want to gain my father's favour?'

Pei Jin didn't reply immediately. He looked carefully at Yan Shi Ning's appearance. Suddenly he remembered something. He pulled out a hairpin from one of the chests. At the top of the hairpin was three pearls and the gold sunlight reflected off them. He secured the hairpin in Yan Shi Ning's hair. 'Wife, this hairpin suits your dress.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't voice her opinion. What could she say? Thank Pei Jin for rummaging through the chests he was going to give to her father?

'Let people think what they like,' Pei Jin said. 'It's clear I'm innocent. How can

people suspect me?’ He paused and inspected Yan Shi Ning’s appearance again. ‘Where’s the jade pendant?’

‘What is it for?’ Yan Shi Ning asked suspiciously.

‘For you to wear,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Are you keeping it safe as an heirloom for the next generation?’

Pei Jin began to search Yan Shi Ning’s body for the jade pendant.

Yan Shi Ning turned around and ran away. ‘I’m not wearing it. It’s ugly to death.’

‘Wear it,’ Pei Jin said. He chased Yan Shi Ning and caught her. ‘It’s a rare jade pendant. It’s more expensive than these gifts combined. If you wear it, it’ll look beautiful.’

‘Even if I die, I’m not wearing it!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning was supposed to appear like a lady. How could she wear such an ugly jade pendant?

While Yan Shi Ning was struggling to escape Pei Jin’s embrace, the sounds of footsteps were approaching them. He lowered his head and kissed her cheek. ‘Someone’s coming, be good.’

Yan Shi Ning stood upright like a lady.

‘Wife, the sleeve of your dress is crooked,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Let me straighten it for you.’

Pei Jin pulled out the jade pendant shaped like a lion and secured it on Yan Shi Ning’s belt.

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the envious two maids at the door and forced herself to smile. ‘Thank you husband.’

After Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning was inside the horse carriage, the two maids gossiped about them.

‘Ninth prince treats his wife well,’ the younger maid said. ‘I saw ninth prince straighten his wife’s dress.’

‘In the past ninth prince has always been gentle,’ the older maid said.

‘It’s not the same,’ the younger maid said. ‘In the past ninth prince didn’t treat Lady Yewu as good as he treats his wife.’

‘That’s because Lady Yewu isn’t as kind as ninth prince’s wife,’ the older maid said. ‘Little sister, you don’t know that each time Lady Yewu met ninth prince, Lady Yewu treated him coldly. Lady Yewu is nothing like ninth prince’s wife who is always friendly and approachable.’

‘Big sister, do you know how Lady Yewu died?’ the younger maid asked.

‘The rumor is that Lady Yewu died of an illness,’ the older maid said. ‘But I think that isn’t the truth-’

‘Who allowed you two talk nonsense behind ninth prince’s back?’ Bei Dou asked.

The two maids were happily gossiping in the gardens and were startled when they heard Bei Dou’s voice behind their backs. They turned around and saw a cold face Bei Dou dressed in black clothes like a demon.

‘If you two talk nonsense again, be careful of your tongues,’ Bei Dou said coldly and walked past the two maids.

The older maid was scared speechless and the younger maid cried. Both maids knew Bei Dou’s threats were scary and real. They remembered the time Tao Xue barged into Bei Dou’s chamber and Tao Xue came running out itching her body. Then Tao Xue left the manor and no one knew if Tao Xue stopped itching.

Bei Dou glanced back at the two maids who were silently walking toward their chambers.

Bei Dou sighed, looked up at the sky and remembered Pei Jin’s request.

‘In the future when you’re free roam around the manor,’ Pei Jin said. ‘If you see anything suspicious you can take care of the situation. Since you have many ways to deal with people who misbehave and everyone in the manor is scared of you.’

Bei Dou wanted to protest. What if free roam around the manor? What was he, a demon? But he didn’t expect people would still talk about Lady Yewu’s death.

Bei Dou leapt on a wall, it was clear in all four directions and he jumped outside the manor. Since Pei Jin chased Su Yue back to Huang Guo's manor, Pei Jin ended all associations with Huang Guo. It meant avenging his family would be prolonged. But he didn't want to wait any longer to avenge his family.

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End of Chapter Fifteen (Part 2)

***Related***



## part 3



### Chapter Fifteen (Part 3 of 3)

The horse carriage traveled toward the Yan Manor.

Inside the horse carriage Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning. Instead of tasting her, he tasted makeup. ‘Wife, why do you need to wear makeup to visit your family?’

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin. Of course she needed to wear makeup to protect herself. She decided to wear makeup on her body at night too that way he wouldn’t dare kiss her impulsively.

Yan Shi Ning remembered last night mouthy boy crawled under her undergarments and he bit sensitive spots on her body. She blushed and considered putting sleeping powder on her face at night too.

The Yan Manor wasn’t far away from Pei Jin’s manor, about half a shichen hour by horse carriage.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were greeted by loud fireworks at the Yan Manor entrance.

Yan Jing saw how Pei Jin treated his oldest daughter lovingly and he smiled faster than he could say what a good son-in-law.

Princess Kang Hua hated seeing how Pei Jin loved Yan Shi Ning, but she smiled politely.

Earlier in the morning Yan Shi Ting ordered a maid to put makeup on her and fussed for a long time to choose earrings compatible with her dress. But Pei Jin only nodded to greet her politely. Like in the past his attention was never focused on her. Even the cold and arrogant seventh prince wanted to gain her favour, but Pei Jin would always ignore her.

Yan Shi Ting almost vomited blood after seeing Pei Jin doted on Yan Shi Ning as though Yan Shi Ning was a treasure.

Yan Shi Ting wanted to protest. What did Yan Shi Ning possess that she didn't? She looked resentfully at Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning until she felt a sudden pain on her arm. It was her mother who whispered a warning to her, 'maintain your image properly.'

Yan Shi Ting hugged her pinched arm, pouted and followed her mother into the Yan Manor.

Everyone sat in the courtyard and gossiped while the celebratory banquet food and wine were prepared.

Yan Jing led the conversation and it gave Yan Shi Ning a headache, her father gossiped about court official Liu Guo. Although it was an inappropriate conversation, her father, Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting didn't care about her family life with Pei Jin. After Pei Jin answered her father politely, everyone quietly drank tea for a while.

Pei Jin smiled and purposely peeled a fruit to neutralize conversation. 'This is a fruit from Southern Jiang. I eat it often.'

Yan Jing's heart was deeply moved. He knew his son-in-law was being considerate.

'I heard the landscape in Southern Jiang is different to the imperial city,' Yan Jing said. 'Gentle ninth prince, tell us what Southern Jiang is like.'

Everyone at the table sat upright and were interested to hear Pei Jin talk about the mysterious Southern Jiang.

Pei Jin could see everyone's ears were sharpened. He passed the peeled fruit to Yan Shi Ning. Then he talked about life in Southern Jiang while occasionally smiling warmly at Yan Shi Ning.

Initially Yan Shi Ting was interested to hear Pei Jin talk about Southern Jiang. But she felt frustrated seeing Pei Jin's consideration toward Yan Shi Ning. Even the fruits her maid peeled for her didn't taste delicious.

Yan Shi Ning noticed Yan Shi Ting's strange behaviour. She didn't understand why it felt like Yan Shi Ting's body released a sour stench. Yan Shi Ting's eyes resentfully looked at her. She wondered if Yan Shi Ting was secretly intimate with Pei Jin. But in the past she never noticed anything shady between Yan Shi Ting and Pei Jin.

Yan Shi Ning looked suspiciously at Pei Jin. But Pei Jin always smiled warmly at her... she couldn't tolerate the demon's excessive loving act and she looked away.

Pei Jin noticed Yan Shi Ning's anger gradually increased so he continued to lavish affectionate attention on her in front of her family.

After the banquet ended Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin were resting in the chamber prepared for them.

'Big brother, are you close to my little sister?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin predicted Yan Shi Ning would ask him about Yan Shi Ting.

'I'm not close to her,' Pei Jin said.

'Big brother, why do I feel the way my little sister looks at you is strange?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin laughed. 'Wife, you should understand her personality.'

'What?' Yan Shi Ning asked confusedly.

'Wife, come here and I'll tell you,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning listened to Pei Jin talked about how in the past there was a period

Yan Shi Ting followed him around to gain his favour. She thought in the past he would have found Yan Shi Ting's attention scary and laughable.

Yan Shi Ning realised even the beautiful and haughty Yan Shi Ting didn't want to be rejected by anyone. In the past Yan Shi Ning saw many men lower themselves beneath Yan Shi Ting's dress, but Yan Shi Ting dismissed them. Yan Shi Ting was indeed haughty. If a man coldly dismissed Yan Shi Ting then Yan Shi Ting wouldn't easily accept rejection. Instead Yan Shi Ting would use a thousand schemes to attract the man who didn't want to pursue Yan Shi Ting. Yan Shi Ting was a natural seductress, which was why if Yan Shi Ting purposely seduced a man usually the man would fall into a deadly trance.

Yan Shi Ning knew that the rare man who wouldn't be seduced by Yan Shi Ting was Pei Jin.

Yan Shi Ning thought that Yan Shi Ting's life would have flowed smoothly until Yan Shi Ting met Pei Jin at a banquet in the palace and Yan Shi Ting got to taste failure. No matter if Yan Shi Ting wore a beautiful dress and makeup or 'accidentally' touched Pei Jin inappropriately, Pei Jin wouldn't glance at Yan Shi Ting. Yan Shi Ning could see in her head how frustrated Yan Shi Ting would have been to hear Pei Jin coldly warn, 'respect yourself.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered how Yan Shi Ting looked resentfully at her during the banquet and she smiled. 'Big brother, were you excessively acting during the banquet to provoke my little sister?'

'Wife, what do you think?' Pei Jin asked and innocently looked at Yan Shi Ning.

In another chamber Princess Kang Hua scolded Yan Shi Ting. 'Your behaviour is poorer by the day! Don't forget, you'll be the crown prince's wife!'

'What's the point of being the crown prince's wife?' Yan Shi Ting asked. 'The crown prince has always been cold toward me. He doesn't care about me like the way ninth prince cares about Yan Shi Ning. The crown prince doesn't love me!'

'That's because you're lacking!' Princess Kang Hua criticized. 'Even if ninth prince is gentle and loving, he's still a useless prince!'

Yan Shi Ting closed her mouth. She wished the crown prince was ninth prince. She didn't understand why she wasn't the one ninth prince cared about as

though he held a grudge against her.

Princess Kang Hua's old nurse maid knocked on the door and entered the chamber. 'Princess, widow Li is here again.'

Princess Kang Hua frowned and spoke softly. 'I know. Bring her to my courtyard, I'll go there first.'

Yan Shi Ting watched them leave hurriedly and she thought it was strange. Who was widow Li? Why did nurse maid Liu speak in an anxious tone? Also, her mother's expression was strange too. She suspected they were hiding a secret.

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End of Chapter Fifteen (Part 3 of 3)

***Related***



## part 1



### Chapter Sixteen (Part 1)

Yan Jing invited his oldest daughter and son-in-law to stay at the Yan Manor for an evening meal.

Pei Jin felt that Yan Shi Ning didn't want to stay in the Yan Manor longer than necessary and he politely declined Yan Jing's invitation.

Yan Jing and Yan Shi Ting escorted Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning to the front door.

'Where's your mother?' Yan Jing asked Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Jing didn't see Princess Kang Hua since the banquet ended.

'Mother is unwell,' Yan Shi Ting said. 'She's resting in her chamber.'

Yan Shi Ting was suspicious why her mother was suddenly unwell after seeing widow Li.

Yan Jing frowned and shook his head. He thought Princess Kang Hua was uncourteous by the day.

Yan Shi Ning saw the clear guilt on her father's face. She didn't want to waste energy being in his presence and politely bid him farewell. 'Father, husband and I will leave first. Little sister, mother is unwell, you should take good care of her.'

Yan Jing felt guiltier, his oldest daughter was indeed filial.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning sat in the humid horse carriage. She parted the window curtains and waved her fan.

Outside the sky was still bright and imperial city streets were crowded with people.

‘Are we going home?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin drank too many cups of wine at the banquet. He used the horse carriage ride as an opportunity to become sober. His eyes were closed but he heard the playfulness in Yan Shi Ning’s tone.

‘You’re right,’ Pei Jin said. ‘The day is still early.’

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning’s arm closer to him as a subtle signal for her to cool his face with the fan.

‘What do you mean?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning was in a good mood. She obliged and waved the fan in front of Pei Jin’s face.

‘Nothing amusing has happened since marriage life,’ Pei Jin said cryptically. ‘Then we should go find a little amusement. Your husband has planned our carefree future. We’ll play in the imperial city for a while then we’ll play everywhere outside the imperial city.’ He leaned his face close to Yan Shi Ning’s face. ‘Wife, what do you think?’

Yan Shi Ning’s eyes shone excitedly. ‘Truly?’

The heavens knew she hated living in the imperial city to death.

Pei Jin smiled and nodded his head. ‘Would I lie to you?’

‘Big brother, have you ever not lied to me?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. ‘Wife, remember to be gentle.’

‘Big brother, aren’t you a prince?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘How can you play outside the imperial city?’

Pei Jin laughed. ‘Don’t forget, I’m a carefree prince.’

Yan Shi Ning fell into deep thought.

Pei Jin was known as ninth gentle prince and also carefree prince. His duties and position in the imperial court were insignificant. During peaceful periods he was privileged to live the life of a carefree prince. But during catastrophic periods his services were summoned. Like the flooding in Xuan Qing six years ago and the rebellion in South Jiang two years ago.

During those times seventh prince and crown prince didn't want to risk their lives. But an imperial figure was needed to restore peace and Pei Jin became the best candidate. Pei Jin understood the situation and volunteered his services. Afterward civilians referred to Pei Jin as gentle ninth prince.

After Pei Jin dealt with threats to the kingdom he would return to his carefree life. He only wanted to perform his duties as a prince and didn't want any power in the imperial court. He was seen as terracotta mixture, transported to places where needed then stored aside to be used in the future. In a less flattering light, he was used as a shield to protect his favored brothers.

Yan Shi Ning wondered if Pei Jin truly didn't want to be acknowledged for his abilities. She remembered a night long ago she brought food to him, he was diligently writing strategies to reduce the damages of flooding under candlelight. But someone else took credit for his strategies.

Yan Shi Ning thought perhaps Pei Jin purposely wanted to appear as a useless and unloved prince to survive life in the cruel palace. Otherwise why else would he let go of control over an army after subduing the rebels in Southern Jiang, return to the imperial city and continued being a carefree prince?

Yan Shi Ning peered at Pei Jin. His head was resting on her thighs and she thought he was a complex person. She didn't want to admit he was a brilliant strategist, his talents were invaluable but he hid his true potential under a gentle and kind mask to deceive the world. It was a pity someone like him didn't want to be emperor... that thought startled her.

Yan Shi Ning sat still for a long time. Pei Jin opened his eyes and saw her startled face.

'Wife, what are you thinking?' Pei Jin asked.



Yan Shi Ning looked closely at Pei Jin's eyes and she smiled. 'I'm thinking about if you have a weakness.'

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was a strong person and it was hard for her to see what his weakness was. If she discovered his weakness then in the future he couldn't bully her anymore.

Pei Jin laughed. He held Yan Shi Ning's neck, pulled her head down and kissed her until she forgot to breathe.

'You,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning was curious what Pei Jin meant. But she pushed his chest away, he kissed her while she was distracted.

Yan Shi Ning looked out the window. The atmosphere in the streets were lively. She saw a stall that sold steamed buns. A woman bought the steamed buns and walked away from the stall. She frowned, the woman's back looked familiar.

'What are you looking at?' Pei Jin asked.

'Perhaps I saw someone familiar,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Who?' Pei Jin asked.

'Big brother, do you remember widow Li in Xuan Qing?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin vaguely remembered a gentle old woman who was a maid in aunty Dung and Yan Shi Ning's home. 'Um. I remember the cong you bings (Chinese scallion pancakes) she made were delicious. Why? Did you see her before?'

Yan Shi Ning shook her head. 'I'm not certain. I only saw the woman's back. I don't think it's her. I wanted to bring her with me to the imperial city. But she said she wants to go south to unite with relatives and couldn't follow me north. She doesn't have any relatives or acquaintances in the imperial city... perhaps she's looking for me.'

Yan Shi Ning looked out the window again, but the woman disappeared.

'If she's looking for you then she can easily find you,' Pei Jin said. 'She can ask anyone in the imperial city directions to the Yan Manor and our home to find you.'

Yan Shi Ning nodded in agreement.

The horse carriage halted. Yan Shi Ning was happy to return to Pei Jin's manor.

Pei Jin parted the door curtains and saw a familiar messenger. He turned around and smiled apologetically at Yan Shi Ning who was about to stand up. 'It appears we need to stay in the horse carriage for a little longer.'

'Ninth prince, mistress, court official Huang Guo is hosting a banquet and requested both of you to attend,' the messenger said.

'Wife, it appears tonight we need to perform,' Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Sixteen (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Sixteen (Part 2 of 2)

Huang Guo was a healthy seventy-year-old man.

Huang Guo's white hair was brushed smoothly. His white hair combined with his dark blue clothes made him look intimidating.

Yan Shi Ning thought the rumor about Huang Guo's strong aura was true.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning's back tensed and he discreetly stroked her hand.

Huang Guo's guests were seated around two banquet tables. Huang Guo's sons, daughter-in-laws and grandchildren were all gathered in the imperial city.

Huang Guo had three sons and one daughter who were scholars and a beautiful phoenix. His daughter was Consort Chen, his three sons were magistrates and married women from prominent families. It was a pity Consort Chen died while pregnant and ruined Huang Guo's chance of having a grandson become emperor.

After Huang Guo resigned from the imperial court there was an assassination attempt on his life. Two off his guards were killed by poisoned arrows. Afterward for a period, his manor was isolated and he was recovering from an illness.

After the banquet Yan Shi Ning was forced to listen to a group of women gossip. In the past she met them at banquets in the palace, but never talked to them and didn't expect to be related to them through marriage. It was hard for her to tolerate their endless gossip. But she answered their questions in a

friendly manner and smiled politely.

Yan Shi Ning praised third aunt's white soft skin and for raising young intelligent children who would grow up to be successful adults. Then she turned to the ordinary second aunt and struggled for a while to think of a praise. 'I heard second aunt is also from a Yan household. Five hundred years ago we would have been in the same tribe.'

While Yan Shi Ning was being a courteous guest she glanced often at the locked door of a nearby chamber.

Pei Jin was detained in the locked chamber for a long time. Incense sticks were burning inside the quiet chamber. He sat opposite Huang Guo who looked at him with complex eyes. He lowered his head, blew on a cup of tea but didn't sip the tea. Neither of them wanted to open their mouths first.

Pei Jin wasn't impatient. He believed little lion was coping against the group of women. After a long silence, Huang Guo conceded.

'Don't you want to change your position?' Huang Guo asked.

Pei Jin smiled and knocked on the wooden chair he sat on. 'This is a good position.'

'Did you wanted to deal with Su Yue long ago?' Huang Guo asked.

'Su Yue is uncle Fan's niece,' Pei Jin said. 'Uncle Fan is good to me. I thought in the future she would become my second wife, but she...' He feigned anger and regret. 'But she is still uncle Fan's niece. In the past uncle Fan once saved me... besides, nothing bad happened so I forgave the offence.'

Huang Guo's face darkened. Last night Su Yue was chased back to his manor and she explained what happened in Pei Jin's manor. He understood that Pei Jin saw through his careful scheme and realised he underestimated the unfavored prince. But he knew Pei Jin wouldn't retaliate because Gentleman Fan had once saved Pei Jin's life.

'It was indeed a good scheme,' Huang Guo praised grudgingly.

Pei Jin didn't deny Huang Guo's words and he quietly drank tea. Some things were better kept inside the heart. If they were voiced, it'd lose its beauty.

‘Except, don’t you want to avenge your mother Consort Chen?’ Huang Guo asked triumphantly.

Pei Jin felt like his heart jumped out of his chest. He didn’t know why Huang Guo suddenly asked about Consort Chen. He didn’t expose Huang Guo’s scheme to conceal his own scheme and the blame was poured over a maid with a cruel conscience.

Huang Guo pulled out a note from his sleeve and passed it to Pei Jin. ‘This afternoon, I discovered this in front of the calligraphy room.’

Pei Jin opened the folded note and his body trembled with anger, ‘the empress killed Consort Chen.’

Pei Jin immediately thought of the impatient MF Bei Dou.

Pei Jin suppressed his anger and feigned shock. ‘This... this...’

‘Long ago I thought Xiao Chen’s death was suspicious,’ Huang Guo said. ‘I couldn’t find evidence to confirm my suspicions, but I didn’t expect this! Your mother was good to you, you need to avenge her!’

Pei Jin fisted his hands. He thought one failed scheme birth a new scheme, and Huang Guo found a way to force him to deal with the empress.

‘I’ll investigate this thoroughly,’ Pei Jin said.

Huang Guo assessed Pei Jin’s expression as though he wanted to see through Pei Jin’s bones. ‘Don’t become an ungrateful and unfilial person!’

Pei Jin felt like he swallowed fleas, stood and left the chamber.

After Pei Jin left, Huang Guo’s third son Fan Min Xian stepped out from behind a screen.

‘Father, can we use Pei Jin?’ Fan Min Xian asked.

Huang Guo shook his head.

‘Do we need to...’ Fan Min Xian said in a dangerous tone.

‘No, he knows our scheme but didn’t expose us to warn us not to do anything reckless,’ Huang Guo said. ‘Also, that there’s no hope for us to use him. He truly doesn’t want to become emperor.’

‘What should we do now?’ Fan Min Xian asked,  
‘We can only silently follow his activities,’ Huang Guo said.

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End of Chapter Sixteen (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# part 1



## Chapter Seventeen (Part 1)

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning left Huang Guo's manor in the horse carriage.

Yan Shi Ning noticed Pei Jin looked a little deflated. 'Big brother, what did you talk to him about?'

Pei Jin stretched his back. 'About imperial court duties.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't force Pei Jin to tell her the truth. Besides, she could guess there was nothing else for them to talk about apart from Su Yue and stealing the throne.

The night sky was dark like ink when they returned to Pei Jin's manor.

Yan Shi Ning was tired from a tensed day. A maid prepared a warm bath for her and she immediately walked to the chamber.

Pei Jin walked in the direction of Bei Dou's chamber.

Bei Dou was about to take off his clothes to sleep but he heard someone barged into his chamber. He turned around and his outer robe was grabbed by Pei Jin's hand.

'You delivered the note!' Pei Jin said coldly.

Bei Dou heard Huang Guo's messenger requested Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning to

attend a banquet and he knew he couldn't deny the truth and anticipated Pei Jin's temper.

Bei Dou pushed Pei Jin's hand away from his outer robe and straightened his outer robe. 'What's the point of asking if you know?'

Pei Jin saw Bei Dou's calm state even after behaving reckless, it made him angry enough to laugh. He sat on a chair and silently looked at Bei Dou.

'It's your fault for being slow,' Bei Dou said. 'I could only borrow someone else's hand.'

Out of Huang Guo's children, Huang Guo loved Consort Chen most. If Huang Guo knew the empress killed Consort Chen, it was certain Huang Guo would avenge Consort Chen's death.'

'You're a good schemer,' Pei Jin praised. 'It's a pity you need to walk a wide circle. When you want to borrow a dagger to kill a person, someone else would also want to borrow a dagger to kill a person. Bei Dou, you gave Huang Guo an opportunity to force me to cooperate with him to deal with the empress.'

Bei Dou suppressed a little guilt. 'That's good. You should cooperate with Huang Guo to deal with the empress.'

Pei Jin rubbed his temples. 'In the past when you wanted me to cooperate with Huang Guo you didn't know about Huang Guo's scheme. But now you know about the Diao Jing Ji, you still want me to cooperate with them... also, you should know my personality. I hate other people forcing me to do something. I'll avenge Consort Chen's death, but I'll not allow anyone cause trouble for me!'

Bei Dou took a deep breath. 'It doesn't matter if Huang Guo uses you. Can't you use him? Don't you care that he sees you as a puppet? With your brilliant strategic mind even if Huang Guo is intelligent, he wouldn't know who'll scare him to death.'

'You want me to risk being exposed by association?' Pei Jin asked.

'Why not?' Bei Dou asked.

'I hate taking any risks,' Pei Jin said.

'Honestly?' Bei Dou asked. 'If you hate taking any risks then in the past why did



you save me?’

The atmosphere in the chamber became tensed.

That year Bei Dou’s family property were taken and his family members were killed. Pei Jin saved him from a fire and hid his identity. He wanted to oppose the imperial court to avenge his family.

‘You say you don’t care about being emperor,’ Bei Dou said. ‘But why did you save a convicted criminal like me? Pei Jin, you’re too cautious, you wouldn’t save me because I saved your life. You saved me because of the gold and silver taels that my Sheng household hid. If you have them in your hands then you can steal the throne.’

Bei Dou kept those thoughts in his heart for a long time. He truly wanted Pei Jin to answer his questions directly.

‘Even if you saved me because of Sheng’s riches I’m willing to give them to you with my own hands,’ Bei Dou said. ‘As long as you help me deal with the empress’ people.’

The chamber was eerily silent. Bei Dou couldn’t see through Pei Jin’s thoughts. Suddenly the sounds of raindrops pitter-pattered on the roof.

A gust of wind blew rain into the chamber and onto Pei Jin’s face. He gently wiped it off his face, stood and closed the window.

‘What if I say that I truly saved you because you saved me?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou wasted his energy to decipher if Pei Jin was sincere. Pei Jin was one of the rare people he knew who was an expert at concealing their true thoughts.

‘Also, everyone in the Sheng household died,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Don’t forget, you’re Bei Dou.’

Bei Dou stood still in the same spot for a long time. Pei Jin’s tone and expression were gentle, but he didn’t know why it made him feel pressured to concede.

‘I have something else I want to tell you,’ Bei Dou said and coughed.

‘What is it?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘I examined the Fu Gui in the incense sticks more carefully,’ Bei Dou said. ‘I discovered the Fu Gui in your wife’s body doesn’t need half a month to be released. Seven days is enough.’

Pei Jin slitted his eyes, grabbed Bei Dou’s collar and punched Bei Dou’s chest. ‘You purposely lied to me!’

Bei Dou rubbed his sore chest. ‘Indeed your wife is someone special to you.’

Pei Jin smiled sincerely. ‘Of course.’

‘It explains why you schemed against Lady Yewu that year,’ Bei Dou said. ‘Honestly, I want to know how she died.’

‘Wait until you die,’ Pei Jin said. ‘You can meet her in hell and ask her how she died.’

Pei Jin pushed the door and left the chamber.

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End of Chapter Seventeen (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Seventeen (Part 2 of 2)

Six years ago the emperor arranged a marriage between Pei Jin and Yewu.

After Pei Jin and Yewu's betrothal was announced a celebratory banquet was held in the palace. Pei Jin initiated a conversation with Yewu but she was cold toward him. After a brief period of interactions with her, he realised why she was always cold toward him – she wanted to be empress and she couldn't be empress if married to an unfavored prince.

After Pei Jin understood the situation, he happily kept his distance from Yewu. Then one day while he and her father were discussing imperial court matters in the palace, they saw Yewu seducing Pei Zhang... a few days later Yewu died of a mysterious illness.

Pei Jin remembered what Yewu's father said to him at Yewu's funeral, 'Thank

you ninth prince for not exposing Yewu in front of the emperor, in the future ninth prince can ask for my help if needed.'

Pei Jin walked on the wet and muddy path to his and Yan Shi Ning's chamber. He didn't tell Bei Dou that he honestly wasn't involved in Yewu's death and didn't know what happened to her until her father said those words to him at the funeral. Initially he wanted to amicably break the betrothal. He didn't expect her father would force her to kill herself.

Pei Jin thought about his seventh brother. Seventh brother only saw two kinds of women in the world. One were women that could be used and the other were women that couldn't be used. It was a pity Yewu in seventh brother's eyes couldn't be used. Seventh brother's heart never grieved Yewu's death.

Pei Jin pushed the chamber door open, stepped to the bed and hugged Yan Shi Ning who was eating on the bed.

Pei Jin was happy he only needed to wait another four days.

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning's cheek. 'Wife, if you washed your face then why is there makeup on your face?'

Yan Shi Ning poked her tongue out and laughed playfully.

Pei Jin understood the reason why Yan Shi Ning wore makeup to bed.

Pei Jin pulled her closer to him and whispered in her ear. 'Wife, if you haven't washed your face then let's bathe together.'

Yan Shi Ning's face immediately paled.

'This is called taking one li and stretching it longer,' Pei Jin teased.

'Ah!' Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Yan Shi Ning would rather die than let go a pole of the bed.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning pitifully bite her lips and he let go of her. 'It's alright if we don't bathe together, but you need to be good and wash the makeup off your face.'

Yan Shi Ning jumped off the bed and ran to wash her face.

Pei Jin shook his head, four days were too long! If he didn't fear his desire

would burn him to death then he would have dragged Yan Shi Ning to bathe together with him long ago.

Pei Jin stood and stepped to the vanity table. He got rid of all the makeup to make it hard for his wife to wear makeup in the future.

Yan Shi Ning returned to the bed, laid down and rolled over so she couldn't see the face of someone who deserved a beating.

'Wife, if you sleep in that position,' Pei Jin said. 'Your chest will be flattened.'

Yan Shi Ning played dead.

Pei Jin pulled the blanket off Yan Shi Ning and slipped a hand beneath her undergarments.

A while later Yan Shi Ning laughed happily. She had waited patiently for Pei Jin's head to crawl onto her skin.

'Wife, what did you put on your body?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning watched Pei Jin jumped off the bed to look for water. 'It's nothing, only chili pepper.'

'Wife, come here!' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin silently vowed that four days later he was going to punish his wife.

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Jin's pitiful state while drinking water and she laughed continuously. That night she dreamt a beautiful dream. But a day past then another day past and she noticed Pei Jin's eyes gradually became more devious as though... soon she couldn't escape.

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End of Chapter Seventeen (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# part 1



## Chapter Eighteen (Part 1)

Pei Jin understood the saying a day equals a year.

During the nights Pei Jin fisted his hands and during the early mornings his intuition warned him Bei Dou was omitting something from him.

‘Bei Dou is it today?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou silently cursed Pei Jin. Pei Jin woke him up too early in the mornings.

Pei Jin smiled, he never seen Bei Dou silently holding back words to that extent.

Bei Dou passed Pei Jin a small bottle.

‘What is this?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Prevents pregnancy,’ Bei Dou said.

Suddenly the small bottle felt heavy in Pei Jin's hand and his face darkened.

'If you don't care about the throne then you're not impatient to have children,' Bei Dou said.

They both knew Yan Shi Ning's life would be endangered if she was pregnant with Pei Jin's child. Pei Jin put the small bottle in a pouch.

'I forgot to tell you the remedy will be harmful to the body if used over a long period,' Bei Dou said.

'You've been playing me!' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin realised it was safe for him to eat Yan Shi Ning long ago, but Bei Dou poured cold water on him by purposely making him wait a long time.

Bei Dou didn't care about Pei Jin's resentful eyes of daggers.

Pei Jin left the Bei Dou's chamber in an angry state. When he returned to his and Yan Shi Ning's chamber, he saw Yan Shi Ning rubbing her neck and his anger disappeared.

Pei Jin remembered he was too excited in the middle of night and suckled Yan Shi Ning's neck.

'Big brother, you dare smile!' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Tonight is the harvest festival banquet. What am I going to wear to hide this?'

Yan Shi Ning picked up a spoonful of chicken congee and ate it but she was too angry to taste anything.

'Wear a dress with a high collar,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin sat next to Yan Shi Ning at the table and he ate half of her bowl of chicken congee.

'Big brother, that's my bowl of chicken congee,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin licked his lips and smiled like a demon. 'What can saliva do?'

Yan Shi Ning thought about Pei Jin kissing her each night and she blushed. What saliva? What prince? If Pei Jin was a prince, how could he shamelessly eat her half eaten bowl of congee?

'Ninth prince, mistress, Lady Su's messenger delivered a chest,' a maid said

from outside the chamber.

Pei Jin accepted the chest from the maid and showed it to Yan Shi Ning. Lady Su was the best dressmaker in the imperial city. He asked Lady Su to make a heavenly dress for Yan Shi Ning. He opened the chest and the dress inside satisfied his request.

‘Wife, come here and see if this dress fits,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Is this dress for me?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin laughed. ‘Do you think it’s for me?’

Yan Shi Ning’s shaky hands picked up the light blue dress that shone like stars. She was overwhelmed by awe, she had never seen such a beautiful dress like it before.

‘This is the first dress from me,’ Pei Jin said. ‘In the future I’ll give you many dresses.’

Yan Shi Ning raised her head and looked at Pei Jin suspiciously.

‘Quickly go change,’ Pei Jin said. ‘You’re wearing this dress to tonight’s harvest festival banquet.’

Yan Shi Ning happily ran to the screen to change into the dress and warmth itched Pei Jin’s heart.

‘In the past didn’t I promise you one day I would give you the most beautiful dress in the world?’ Pei Jin asked.

The twelve-year-old Yan Shi Ning wasn’t the same as the six-year-old Yan Shi Ning who only knew how to eat, play and sleep. The twelve-year-old Yan Shi Ning slowly pass by the dressmaker’s shop in Xuan Qing and admired the beautiful dress fabrics. But her mother never accepted her father’s silver taels so all her dresses could only be ordinary.

At that time Pei Jin was only given a small monthly allowance from the palace, but it was used to build good connections. He didn’t have enough money to buy Yan Shi Ning beautiful dresses and he could only promise her, ‘one day I’ll give you the most beautiful dress in the world.’

Of course Yan Shi Ning would deny she loved beautiful dresses, ‘who would



want a beautiful dress?’

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t believe she finally wore a heavenly dress. She turned around and saw Pei Jin behind her.

‘Big brother, why are you standing here?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘You don’t need to be shy,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I’ve seen and touched it before.’

Goose bumps surfaced on Yan Shi Ning’s whole body. ‘Big brother, did you ask a dressmaker to make this dress for me?’

Pei Jin nodded his head.

‘Big brother, then how did you know my body measurements?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin waved his hands. ‘I told you I’ve seen and touched it. Why wouldn’t I know your body measurements?’

‘Go to your grave!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin laughed shamelessly. Of course he would know Yan Shi Ning’s body measurements after measuring one of her dresses.

Yan Shi Ning calmed her temper, stepped in front of the screen and sat next to Pei Jin.

‘Big brother, why did you give me a dress?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I was scared you would throw away all your ugly dresses,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Big brother, you’re too generous,’ Yan Shi Ning mocked.

‘Of course, your husband is always generous,’ Pei Jin said.

‘But... this dress must be expensive,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning knew Lady Su’s dresses were the most expensive dresses in the imperial city. At the banquet in the palace more than a month ago, Yan Shi Ning wore a dress made by Lady Su and it was almost expensive as half of the prime minister’s yearly allowance. She only needed to glance at the dress she wore to know that it was more expensive than the dress Yan Shi Ning wore that day.

‘Wife, are you sad for your husband’s lost silver taels?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘You don’t

need to be sad. As long as you're happy, your husband is willing to lose all his property.'

Yan Shi Ning suspected Pei Jin was secretly rich. She shook her head. What property? Pei Jin had little property to lose.

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End of Chapter Eighteen (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Eighteen (Part 2 of 2)

A rumor spread faster than the guests drank wine at harvest festival banquet.

The gentle ninth prince spent three years of earnings to buy his wife a heavenly dress.

Yan Jing's heart felt a happy pain.

Jealousy covered Yan Shi Ting's heart.

Seventh prince laughed coldly. His ninth brother was entrapped by beauty and became wasteful.

The emperor thought Pei Jin was more unpredictable by the day.

Pei Jin was happy he could finally give Yan Shi Ning a heavenly dress. He didn't care about the disapproving stares from other people in the palace.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning stood dignified in the palace banquet hall and everyone thought they were smiling lovingly at each other.

The light blue dress highlighted Yan Shi Ning's snow white skin. Moonlight reflected off the tiny gold flower jewels embroidered on her dress... everyone thought she changed into a heavenly beauty.

It was the first time Yan Shi Ning received attention from other people since living in the imperial city. The heavens knew she wanted to be an invisible wall to

past the banquet by eating and drinking. She didn't expect Pei Jin would give her a heavenly dress and have everyone's eyes focused on her. Although she was uncomfortable to death by the stares, she maintained her gentle lady image.

'Ninth brother, I haven't seen you for a few days but your face is glowing,' Pei Zhang praised. 'Indeed a newly wedded man is a happy man.'

Pei Zhang praised Pei Jin, but Pei Zhang's eyes were looking regretfully at the heavenly Yan Shi Ning he conceded to Pei Jin.

'Seventh brother is right,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning wasn't amused by the two brothers' exchange. She turned around to walk to the banquet table, but someone pulled her dress. She looked down and saw a loveable little boy dressed in light gold clothes. The little boy looked about three years old, he had a chubby body and his big round eyes were looking at her.

'Nin, Nin,' the little boy said.

Yan Shi Ning was about to ask who the little boy was but a little girl ran to him and fiercely pulled him away from her dress.

'Fat kitten!' the little girl said. 'You dare run away!'

The little boy fell on his bottom. He didn't hurt his bottom but the little girl's loud scold scared him and he cried.

Pei Jin picked up the little boy and consoled the little boy.

'Thirteenth brother, what are you doing here?' Pei Jin asked.

Heavens! Yan Shi Ning didn't expect the little boy was Pei Jin's youngest brother, Pei Khan.

The last time Yan Shi Ning visited the palace, Consort La was pregnant so she didn't see Consort La and Pei Khan.

'Wen Cai!' Pei Zhang called coldly.

'Father... seventh father,' the little girl said.

Suddenly Consort La and Pei Zhang's wife Jing Thi ran toward their children.

Consort La was relieved Pei Khan wasn't hurt. 'Pei Khan, why did you run here?'

Before weren't you playing with little Wen Cai?'

Consort La and Pei Khan were walking in the palace gardens when they bumped into Jing Thi and Pei Wen Cai. So Consort La let Pei Khan play with Pei Wen Cai while she gossiped with Jing Thi. After a while she and Jing Thi couldn't see Pei Khan and Pei Wen Cai in the gardens and panicked.

'Hit, Hit!' Pei Khan said and looked at Pei Wen Cai.

Pei Khan wanted to say he ran away because Pei Wen Cai hit him in the gardens. But he couldn't speak clearly and could only look accusingly at Pei Wen Cai. He silently cursed the rotten egg Pei Wen Cai who always bullied him.

Pei Wen Cai could speak clearer and denied she hit Pei Khan. 'Nonsense, I didn't hit you!'

Pei Khan buried his head in Pei Jin's chest because Pei Wen Cai's tone was too scary.

Yan Shi Ning wondered why two three-year-old children were the same age but were treated differently by their family members. Pei Khan was a prince yet he was fearful of seventh prince's daughter.

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End of Chapter Eighteen (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Nineteen



## Chapter Nineteen

Consort La refrained from scolding Pei Wen Cai.

Yan Shi Ning saw Consort La's sad eyes and she realised Consort La felt powerless to protect Pei Khan.

'Xiao Khan, stop holding onto your ninth brother and come down,' Consort La said.

Pei Khan hugged Pei Jin tighter.

'Mother, it's alright,' Pei Jin said. 'Thirteenth brother still can't speak?'

Consort La nodded her head and her eyes saddened. Pei Khan was three years old but he couldn't say more than two consecutive words. It was rumored Pei Khan was foolish thirteenth prince. The emperor favored Consort La after Pei Khan was born, but Consort La lost the emperor's favor when Pei Khan was slow to speak.

Pei Jin stroked Pei Khan's head affectionately. 'Mother, you don't need to worry. Thirteenth brother looks intelligent. He'll be able to speak in the future.'

Consort La sighed helplessly.

Yan Shi Ning looked lovingly at Pei Khan while he sat on Pei Jin's shoulders.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning smiling warmly at Pei Khan and he realised the little

lion loved children.

Yan Shi Ning looked lovingly at Pei Khan because Pei Khan looked like a loveable fool and her heart encouraged her to tease Pei Khan.

The tree branches in the gardens were decorated with fabrics and lanterns and banquet tables were set in the gardens for guests to view the moon on the night of the harvest festival. Yan Shi Ning smelt delicious aromas of food and wine. She happily ate fruits, drank wine and listened to singers. She would have been happier if she wasn't sitting near two people who were staring at her strangely.

Pei Jin sat on the left of Yan Shi Ning, he was talking to a diplomat visiting from another kingdom. On the right of her was Yan Shi Ting who sat between her and the crown prince.

According to palace protocols Yan Shi Ting wasn't allowed to sit next to the crown prince if she wasn't his wife. But the empress said to the emperor, 'I haven't seen Yan Shi Ting for a few days and I miss her. Let her sit here.'

Yan Shi Ting acted reluctant to sit next to the crown prince. Yan Shi Ting and the crown prince side by side looked like a stunning painting and everyone knew Yan Shi Ting would become the crown prince's wife.

Unfortunately Yan Shi Ting's usual haughtiness wavered a little after sitting next to Yan Shi Ning. She wore a dress that took days to make, but it wasn't even expensive as half of the dress Yan Shi Ning wore.

In the past Yan Shi Ting looked more beautiful than Yan Shi Ning because Yan Shi Ting wore beautiful dresses and makeup. But after Yan Shi Ning married Pei Jin, Yan Shi Ning was no longer the poor daughter from Xuan Qing.

Yan Shi Ting was unhappy everyone were admiring Yan Shi Ning instead of her. She even caught the crown prince staring at Yan Shi Ning many times.

Yan Shi Ting was jealous and frustrated but she knew where she was sitting and controlled her tongue.

'Big brother crown prince, eat this fruit,' Yan Shi Ting said.

'Thank you,' Pei Lam said and looked at Yan Shi Ning. 'Ninth sister, you should eat this fruit too.'

Afterward Pei Lam pretended to watch the dancers. But his heart lingered on the image of Yan Shi Ning adjusting her collar and showed a glimpse of the red kiss mark on her snow white neck. Then his little brother hardened.

Yan Shi Ning sighed happily after Yan Shi Ting and the crown prince stopped staring at her.

Yan Shi Ning saw a palace nurse maid was holding Pei Khan's hand while walking around the gardens.

'Nin, Nin,' Pei Khan said after he saw Pei Jin.

Pei Khan let go of his nurse maid's hand and he ran toward Pei Jin. But he accidentally bumped into Yan Shi Ting and fell on the ground. He cried, pulled Yan Shi Ting's dress to stand up and the dirt on his hands stained Yan Shi Ting's dress.

Yan Shi Ting wanted to vent her jealousy and frustrations on the rumored foolish thirteenth prince who dared to stain her dress.

Yan Shi Ning picked up Pei Khan and consoled him. 'Why is a little man like you crying like an old man, your face will come off.'

Pei Khan startled Yan Shi Ning, she had spoken softly but he heard her.

Pei Khan heard Yan Shi Ning's soft voice. He looked at her, sniffed and stopped crying.

The palace nurse maid saw Pei Khan holding onto ninth prince's wife. She quickly walked to them to carry Pei Khan away but Pei Khan hugged ninth prince's wife's neck tightly.

'It's alright, let thirteenth prince play here with me,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Khan wiped his nose on Yan Shi Ning's dress while she was distracted. She gently pinched his bottom.

Pei Khan retaliated by patting Yan Shi Ning's dress and spoke in a serious tone. 'Small, small.'

Pei Jin laughed and nearly spat out the tea in his mouth. He leaned close to Yan Shi Ning and whispered in her ear. 'Wife, your chest is truly small.'



Yan Shi Ning's head spun insanely. Mouthy boy and little boy were truly brothers!

Yan Shi Ning was about to curse Pei Jin but suddenly a piercing shriek was heard.

'Assassins!' a guest cried out.

Yan Shi Ning was shocked to see the assassins and the palace guards' swords clashing in front of her and chaos around her.

Pei Khan was scared to death and buried his head into Yan Shi Ning's chest like a little scared turtle putting its head in its shell.

There were many assassins in all directions of the gardens. Some assassins were disguised as palace guards. Most of the assassins' target was the emperor. But some of them were fighting their way toward Yan Shi Ning's direction, where there were three princes near her.

Yan Shi Ting screamed loudly, hid behind Pei Lam and gripped his outer robe. His face darkened and he grabbed two wine jars. One to shield his chest from an assassin's sword and he used the other to smash the assassin's head. Then he kicked the assassin's little brother.

While another assassin was attacking Pei Jin, Yan Shi Ning hugged Pei Khan tightly.

Pei Jin stood in front of Yan Shi Ning and Pei Khan. He picked up a cup and aimed it at the assassin's face. The assassin's sword struck the cup and aimed the sword at the unprotected Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Shi Ting screamed and used all her strength to pull Yan Shi Ning in front of her to shield her from the assassin's sword.

'Shi Ning!' Pei Jin warned.

Pei Jin leapt and kicked the assassin's chest. The assassin's sword sliced the sleeve of Yan Shi Ning's dress before the assassin fell on the ground.

In that moment Yan Shi Ning's whole body stiffened from shock and she couldn't stop tears falling down her face.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning.

‘Don’t be scared, I’m here,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin’s eyes stung, he was scared to death he almost lost Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Lam watched Pei Jin hug Yan Shi Ning for a while. Then he glanced at Yan Shi Ting, remembered Yan Shi Ting’s reaction and he smiled cryptically.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were hugging each other tightly after a life and death situation. After their hearts calmed a little they felt something move between them.

Pei Khan raised his head and he exhaled. ‘No air, no air.’

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning laughed. Afterward he hugged both Yan Shi Ning and Pei Khan tightly. But his eyes looked menacingly at Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Shi Ting was shocked by Pei Jin who was usually a gentle man, because there was deadly cold aura in his eyes and her body shook uncontrollably.

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End of Chapter Nineteen

***Related***

## part 1



### Chapter Twenty (Part 1)

The palace guards apprehended the assassins.

But the assassins hid poison under their tongues. They swallowed it, blood dripped out of their mouths and they died.

The emperor commanded the palace guards to investigate who was responsible for the assassination attempt. Then the emperor ordered the imperial physicians to follow him to his chamber because Pei Zhang was injured.

During the banquet Pei Zhang wasn't sitting near the emperor but he flew to save the emperor the moment he heard assassins entered the palace. But an assassin's sword stabbed Pei Zhang's body while he was protecting the emperor.

Inside the emperor's chamber, many imperial physicians surrounded the

unconscious Pei Zhang.

‘If anything happens to seventh prince, I’ll bury all of you together with him,’ the emperor threatened.

Consort Mu stood near the bed and she cried at the sight of her unconscious son.

The empress feigned concern for Pei Zhang’s life. But her heart regretted Pei Zhang didn’t die immediately after being stabbed. It also feared Pei Zhang would wake up and his bond with the emperor would grow stronger enough for the emperor to make Pei Zhang the crown prince instead of Pei Lam.

Pei Lam stood beside his mother and he was in deep thought about the situation.

Consort La was holding a sleeping Pei Khan in her arms. Pei Khan stirred in his sleep when he heard the emperor’s loud voice. Pei Khan raised his head from his mother’s chest, he didn’t see anyone wanted to harm him and continued to sleep on his mother’s chest.

Pei Jin was gaging everyone’s expressions. He noticed Pei Khan was startled by the emperor, Pei Khan’s head raised and laid back on Consort La’s chest to sleep. Then he looked at the tired Yan Shi Ning who stood beside him and his heart beckoned Pei Zhang to wake up so that he and Yan Shi Ning could go home to bathe and sleep.

Pei Jin wasn’t worried about Pei Zhang’s life. He knew if Pei Zhang died that easily then he wasn’t Pei Zhang. Also, the assassins that entered the palace that night were strange.

The assassins were too familiar with the palace surroundings and chose a night when the imperial families were gathered and unarmed. It meant the person who hired the assassins was someone who knew the palace surroundings and when was a good opportunity for an ambush attack. Even if he was beaten to death, he wouldn’t believe that everyone in the emperor’s chamber was innocent.

Pei Jin’s eyes swept over the emperor, empress, the emperor’s consorts, princes and imperial physicians. But he didn’t discover anything unusual about

their expressions.

‘Seventh prince is saved by his ancestor’s good deeds,’ the head imperial physician said. ‘His body is stable and he’ll recover after resting for a period.’

The emperor and Consort Mu sighed in relief but the empress smiled coldly.

‘Xiao Zhang is injured, he can stay here while he’s recovering,’ the emperor said.

Everyone was shocked by the emperor’s words. When a prince who wasn’t the crown prince was allowed to remain in the palace had a significant meaning.

The emperor’s eyes swept over everyone in his chamber. Finally he looked at Yan Shi Ning and nodded his head. ‘It’s late, everyone can leave.’

Under the full moon, Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning inside the horse carriage. She didn’t struggle and felt safe being protected by him. His words of reassurance after the attack echoed in her heart, ‘don’t be scared, I’m here.’

Yan Shi Ning wasn’t scared as long as she had Pei Jin. Whether she was a six-year-old being bullied, a twelve-year-old being chased by fierce dog or an eighteen-year-old being attacked... as long as he was with her, he would always protect her with his life.

Yan Shi Ning’s eyes stung. She knew clearly the scoundrel who always bullied her was the only one who truly cared about her and was good to her.

‘Why are you crying?’ Pei Jin asked and searched for a handkerchief to wipe Yan Shi Ning’s tears.

Yan Shi Ning silently wrapped her arms around Pei Jin’s neck and hugged him tightly.

Yan Shi Ning startled Pei Jin. It was the second time Yan Shi Ning initiated a hug. The first time was many years ago. That day she was chased by a fierce dog and the moment she saw him she cried and hugged him.

Pei Jin gently patted Yan Shi Ning’s back. ‘Wife, what do you want to do by falling on my chest?’

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Jin’s teasing tone and she bit his neck.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning's soft warm lips on his skin and immediately his little brother woke up. He wrapped his arms around her waist. Her teeth let go of his neck, he looked at her beautiful face under the moonlight that shone through the window and his lips leaned closer to her lips.

Suddenly the horse carriage halted.

'Ninth prince, mistress, you're home,' the groomsman said.

Yan Shi Ning saw the frustration on Pei Jin's face and she laughed.

Pei Jin hit Yan Shi Ning's bottom. 'Don't worry, tonight will be a long night.'

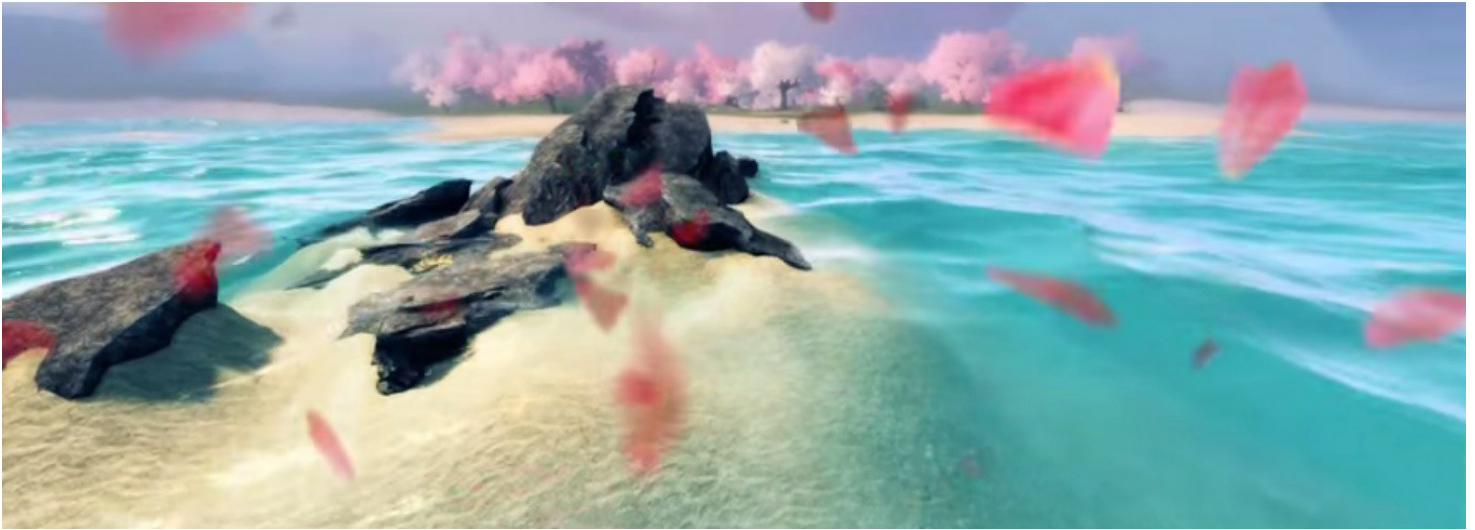
Yan Shi Ning immediately stopped laughing.

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End of Chapter Twenty (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Twenty (Part 2 of 2)

A bath after a long day would soothe tired bodies.

Yan Shi Ning ran to the bath tub of warm water and took off her dress. She saw the hole on a sleeve and felt a little regret. Luckily the rest of the dress wasn't torn.

Yan Shi Ning took off her inner robes and was about to take off her undergarments but someone hugged her from behind.

'Wife, let's bathe together,' Pei Jin said in a husky tone.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's bare hard chest pressed against her back. Her legs wobbled and her head spun. She turned her head around and spoke softly. 'Let's not.'

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Jin only wore his outer robe, she panicked and looked away from him. Although she slept on the same bed with him for a few nights, he wore his undergarments to bed.

Pei Jin smiled at the sight of Yan Shi Ning's flushed face. 'But your husband wants to bathe with you.'

Pei Jin carried Yan Shi Ning in his arms and leapt into the bath tub.

Yan Shi Ning held onto the edge of the bath tub and wanted to jump out but Pei Jin captured her hands... and began to take off her undergarments.

Yan Shi Ning risked her life to stop Pei Jin taking off her undergarments. But her undergarments had two ribbon knots that he assessed for many days to find out the fastest way to untie them. So her undergarments were swiftly tossed out of the bath tub.

‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Yan Shi Ning quickly hid her naked body beneath the flower petals that were floating above the water surface. She looked at Pei Jin, his outer robe was tossed out of the bath tub too.

Yan Shi Ning’s face felt like it was melting at the sight of Pei Jin’s masculine naked body. She quickly turned her back to him but he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her closer to him. He was in a sitting position and her body ended up sitting on his lap.

‘Big brother, what do you want to do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin nibbled on Yan Shi Ning’s earlobe. ‘Wife, what do you think?’

Yan Shi Ning felt something hard under her bottom. ‘Big brother, didn’t you promise you wouldn’t force me?’

‘I’m not forcing you,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning felt she wasted her thoughts earlier thinking mouthy boy was a good person.

Pei Jin’s hugged Yan Shi Ning too tightly for her to escape. She felt his hands rubbed her breasts. Her misty eyes focused on her abandoned undergarments outside the bath tub.

‘Big brother, you haven’t washed your body properly,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Wife, you don’t want to wash your body properly?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘You can’t wait any longer? Alright, I’ll oblige you.’

Pei Jin carried Yan Shi Ning out of the bath tub. He grabbed a wash cloth, dried their bodies and carried her onto the bed.

‘Big brother, let me wear my clothes,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘It’ll be troublesome to wear clothes and take it off again,’ Pei Jin said.



Pei Jin laid on top of Yan Shi Ning. He bit her neck while his hands stroked the sensitive spots on her body.

A pleasurable sensation melted Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Big brother, you're a liar.'

'When did I lie to you?' Pei Jin asked.

'Big brother, you said you wouldn't force yourself on me,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'But I remember someone said I didn't need to endure anymore,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Jin smiled like a fox and she panicked. 'At that time I wanted to repay a favor I owed you.'

'I want to repay a favor I owe you too,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin licked his lips and kissed Yan Shi Ning's lips.

'Umm...' Yan Shi Ning moaned.

Pei Jin's tongue stroked Yan Shi Ning's tongue and her will power to resist him wavered. When her head spun from lack of air, his lips released her lips and she took a deep breath. She didn't get a chance to open her mouth because his lips engulfed her lips again.

Pei Jin gasped for air. In the past he didn't take off Yan Shi Ning's undergarments because he feared he would lose control. Finally he could admire her naked body that made his heart jump excitedly.

Pei Jin's eyes roamed over Yan Shi Ning's collar bone, soft breasts, slim waist and her long slender legs... his body was on the verge of exploding. He roughly spread her legs.

Yan Shi Ning felt her legs parted. She pushed his chest but failed to push his body off her body.

'Shi Ning, give it to me,' Pei Jin whispered in Yan Shi Ning's ear.

Pei Jin's gentle request entered Yan Shi Ning's ear and travelled to her heart. She looked at the intense desire in his eyes and her heart trembled.

Yan Shi Ning reciprocated Pei Jin's kiss.

Pei Jin's lips moved tenderly from Yan Shi Ning's lips down to her collar bone, breasts, stomach and waist. He wanted to relax her body before causing her

body pain.

Yan Shi Ning felt too nervous and her whole body tensed. Pei Jin's kisses on her body made her feel like she was drifting in the middle of the sea and she didn't know where to swim to for shelter.

A while later Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's fingers stroked between her thighs. Suddenly she felt something slowly released from her stomach and she pushed his chest hard.

'You can't!' Yan Shi Ning warned.

Yan Shi Ning's outburst startled Pei Jin.

'Why?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning bit her lower lip. 'I think my step-aunt arrived...'

Pei Jin looked down and saw a speck of blood on Yan Shi Ning's thigh and he almost spat out blood. Heavens! Why would the heavens tease a person in that way? Why didn't the heavens let the assassins stab him to death?

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End of Chapter Twenty (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Twenty-One



## Chapter Twenty-One

The following morning Yan Shi Ning woke up refreshed.

In contrast Pei Jin woke up frustrated. Yan Shi Ning was smiling mockingly at him and his frustrations calmed.

‘Wife, you can hide at the start of a month but you’ll be caught before the middle of a month,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t refute Pei Jin’s words. Instead she glanced in all four directions. She was satisfied they were alone and spoke softly. ‘Big brother, who do you think sent the assassins?’

‘Wife, you’re home,’ Pei Jin said. ‘You don’t need to be weary at home.’

Yan Shi Ning remembered everyone inside Pei Jin’s manor were within control of his palm, she realised she worried pointlessly. ‘Big brother, what do you think?’

‘Wife, what do you think?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Anyone is possible,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Why?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘The assassins attacked the emperor and the princes,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘It looks like they wanted to kill the Dian Kingdom’s emperor and heirs and cause chaos throughout the Dian Kingdom. If that’s true then who are the Dian Kingdom’s strongest enemies?’

Pei Jin nodded in agreement. ‘That’s a possibility.’

‘But there’s a flaw in that logic,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Diplomats from Dian Kingdom’s strongest enemy kingdoms attended the banquet. If they sent the assassins then there’s no reason for them to risk sending their most talented ministers and warriors.’

‘Um, you’re right,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Besides imperial father wouldn’t allow diplomats from enemy kingdoms to enter the palace without having them followed to find out if they were planning an ambush.’

Yan Shi Ning glanced in all directions and she smiled. ‘You and your father share that same trait.’

‘Of course, we’re father and son after all,’ Pei Jin said. ‘If they won’t sent by an enemy kingdom then who do you think is the culprit?’

Yan Shi Ning shook her head. ‘I’m not certain. But I think that anyone else is a possibility.’

‘Who else?’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin looked like he was in deep thought. ‘Big brother, I think you know who the suspects are.’

Pei Jin nodded his head. ‘But I want to hear your thoughts since my little lion loves to solve mysteries the most.’

‘I think the first suspect is seventh prince,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Even if he saved the emperor, who can be certain it’s not a ruse to escape suspicion? He and the crown prince are the strongest candidate to become emperor. If he saves the emperor then his bond with the emperor would be stronger than the emperor’s bond with the crown prince. Also, the assassins attacked the emperor, the crown prince and big brother. But the assassins didn’t attack him. It’s possible he wants

to earn the emperor's gratitude and if the crown prince and big brother died during the attack then he'll have less threats.'

Pei Jin poured tea into two cups. 'Indeed seventh brother is a suspect. But if they were sent by seventh brother, he wouldn't leave a trail to trace back to him.'

'I thought about that too,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'It's also a possibility someone wants to frame seventh prince.'

'Alternately, he purposely ordered them not to attack him to make him less suspicious,' Pei Jin said. 'Mixing truths and lies together is a tactic seventh brother likes to use to fool others.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered when she attended her first banquet in the palace, she wasn't familiar with the surroundings and accidentally bumped into Pei Zhang. He looked at her condescendingly and his cold arrogance made him hateful.

Pei Jin noticed Yan Shi Ning was frowning while he drank tea. 'What are you thinking?'

'I don't like Pei Zhang,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I think he's a dangerous person.'

'More dangerous than me?' Pei Jin teased.

'No, big brother is a lot more dangerous than him,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning spoke truthfully. Although Pei Zhang was cold hearted and wasn't someone a person could easily befriend, Pei Zhang wasn't as dangerous as Pei Jin. Because Pei Jin's gentle and kind act allowed other people to dare to come closer to Pei Jin with their guards down.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning gritted her teeth and he smiled. 'If you could choose to marry seventh brother or me, who would you choose?'

Heavens! Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was asking her to choose between a dangerous man and a more dangerous man to marry.

Yan Shi Ning picked up a sweet bun and tucked it in Pei Jin's mouth. 'Eat!'

Pei Jin happily ate the sweet bun. 'Who else do you suspect?'

Yan Shi Ning felt like talking to Pei Jin was like walking in different directions,

from jests to sincere conversations.

‘The second and third suspects are the empress and the crown prince,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘They could have sent assassins to frame seventh prince. Big brother, think about why it’s strange the assassins attacked the crown prince and big brother but didn’t attack seventh prince. It’s a possibility the empress and the crown prince wants other people to suspect seventh prince. It’s a pity if they sent the assassins, they wouldn’t have anticipated seventh prince would risk his life to save the emperor.’

‘But to frame seventh brother by directly attacking imperial father wouldn’t benefit the empress,’ Pei Jin said. ‘If seventh brother didn’t protect imperial father... what would be the consequences? Supporters for seventh brother and the crown prince are strong on both sides. If the empress knows when victory is uncertain, she wouldn’t use that tactic.’

Yan Shi Ning realised Pei Jin understood everyone in the palace as much as he was familiar with his fingers.

‘Who else?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Someone from Huang Guo’s manor,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin’s forehead creased, he didn’t expect Yan Shi Ning would also think people from Huang Guo’s side were suspects.

‘After the assassins were captured they killed themselves,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘To train assassins to be loyal and protect their master’s identity, their master needs to be someone who is powerful enough that the assassins would be scared to betray them. I did think about Consort La being a suspect. But Consort La’s relatives doesn’t have powerful connections.’

Pei Jin shook her head. ‘Wife, that’s a naive notion. Even if Consort La’s relatives doesn’t have powerful connections, thirteenth brother could become emperor and her relatives will gain more power. There are some people who are willing to gamble once for the biggest gain.’

‘Big brother, do you suspect Consort La?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning felt that Consort La was a gentle and sincere person and the loveable fool Pei Khan would struggle to become emperor.

‘I wanted to say that you shouldn’t dismiss someone if they don’t have powerful connections,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Because sometimes a person purposely make themselves appear like they have no powerful connections to hide their powerful connections.’

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was alluding to himself and she was curious if he secretly built powerful connections. ‘What about big brother?’

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hand and his finger wrote yes on her palm.

Yan Shi Ning raised her head and looked closely at Pei Jin’s expression. In that moment the wind rattled the window.

‘Wife, it appears you’re fooled again,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Jin’s laugh until he was breathless and her heart pounded angrily. She couldn’t believe earlier she was willing to give herself to an expert liar.

Pei Jin felt that Yan Shi Ning was truly angry. He pulled her onto his lap and hastily consoled her. ‘I was teasing you. You were right about Huang Guo. He could have sent the assassins. Think about it, I wasn’t armed but the assassins were armed and they didn’t injure me. But if he sent the assassins, it’s strange why the assassins didn’t attack seventh brother.’

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning tightly. She ignored his shameless hands on her body and listened to his persuasive reasoning.

‘Big brother, if everyone is capable then who is the culprit?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin nibbled Yan Shi Ning’s earlobe and blew in her ear. ‘Wife, you forgot someone.’

‘Who?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Your husband,’ Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Twenty-One

***Related***



# part 1



## Chapter Twenty-Two (Part 1)

‘You?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head. ‘While you’re suspecting other people, other people are suspecting your husband.’

Yan Shi Ning thought it was reasonable other people would suspect Pei Jin who was a prince. But she glanced at his arm wrapped around her waist then at his free hand that was comfortably holding a cup of tea... she didn’t believe he sent those assassins.

Yan Shi Ning knew if Pei Jin sent assassins, his enemies would be killed cleanly and none of his assassins would die.

‘I almost forgot one more person,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Who else?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin looked at the dark blue sky outside. ‘Imperial father.’

In the Chi Ruan chamber of the palace the emperor was reading reports from Southern Jiang. Although the news reported were good, he wasn’t happy.

Wang Fu Mu, the emperor’s advisor stood beside the emperor. He didn’t fault the emperor for being unhappy. He knew the emperor was someone who liked all situations to be controlled within his hand.



‘Wang Fu Mu,’ the emperor said.

‘Your servant is here,’ Wang Fu Mu hunched his back and stepped toward the emperor.

‘Who do you think did it?’ the emperor asked.

‘I think anyone is a possibility,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

The emperor laughed coldly. ‘I only wanted to see their true hearts and sacrificed some assassins. I didn’t expect two assassins from outside the palace dared to enter the palace.’

‘Your majesty, don’t be angry,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

‘Go bring tenth crown prince and ninth prince here!’ the emperor ordered.

‘Yes your majesty,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

Back in Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s chamber, she was shocked by who he suspected.

‘How can that be?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Why not?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘Imperial father is capable of anything.’

‘Why would he order assassins to attack himself and his sons?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t believe the emperor would do something foolish.

Pei Jin felt cold thinking about his ruthless father. He hugged Yan Shi Ning and spoke in a sad tone. ‘Wife, you don’t understand him. I think he did it to see who he should support to become his heir.’

Yan Shi Ning reflected on Pei Jin’s words for a while. ‘It’s possible he wants to see in a life and death situation who would save him.’

Pei Jin nodded his head. ‘He is someone who doesn’t easily trust another person.’

Yan Shi Ning took a deep breath, it was an insane situation. But if the emperor was the culprit then his purpose was to see who he could trust without risking anyone’s life.

‘Big brother, do you think seventh prince’s wish will be granted?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Perhaps,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Then last night the emperor acted outraged?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Your father-in-law is also someone who knows how to perform well,’ Pei Jin praised.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin’s body relaxed a little.

‘Wife, do you think seventh brother or crown prince will make a better emperor?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin asked Yan Shi Ning a question that the world speculated secretly. But his teasing tone felt like he was asking her, ‘which taste better, a white radish or a carrot?’

‘Big brother, can’t you ask me more discreetly?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Alright, what taste better, a white radish or a carrot?’ Pei Jin asked and wrapped his arms around Yan Shi Ning’s waist tighter.

‘The white radish is a little too cruel,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If it becomes emperor, it’ll be a tyrant ruler. The carrot...’ An image of a delicate and beautiful crown prince in her head made her hesitate. ‘Carrot looks a little indecisive.’

‘What about the little red radish?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin asked about Pei Khan and she smiled. ‘The little red radish is scared of death. When scared, it will bury its head into a person’s chest.’

‘Then those radishes and that carrot isn’t easy to eat,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Um,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin had anticipated Yan Shi Ning’s answer. He lowered his head and kissed her. ‘Wife, it appears you can only eat my radish. My radish is fragrant and delicious. Come here and eat it.’

When there was no gap between Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s lips, a maid’s voice was heard from outside their chamber.

‘Ninth prince, mistress, a palace messenger is here,’ the maid said.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Two (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Twenty-Two (Part 2 of 2)

Pei Jin waited outside the Chi Ruan chamber.

Pei Jin could smell the strong herbal scent of the incense sticks while waiting outside.

A while later the crown prince opened the door. The crown prince looked like he was suppressing his frustrations and a little sadness.

‘Ninth brother,’ Pei Lam said.

‘Tenth brother, you’re here too,’ Pei Jin said.

Wang Fu Mu walked to the door before Pei Lam could answer.

‘Ninth prince, come inside,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

Pei Jin looked at the crown prince, nodded his head and entered the Chi Ruan chamber. He immediately saw shattered stone pieces on the floor and his heart became weary.

The emperor tossed a report at Pei Jin.

‘Do you have something to say?’ the emperor asked.

Pei Jin picked up the report from the floor. He feigned shock and knelt on the shattered stone pieces. ‘Imperial father, I was framed.’

‘Two of the assassins were from Southern Jiang!’ the emperor said coldly. ‘You were in Southern Jiang for two years. Indeed you gathered good people!’

Pei Jin’s face whitened. ‘I was framed.’

‘I’m only giving you one chance to explain,’ the emperor said.

Pei Jin knelt on the cold shattered stone pieces long enough for its coldness to flow to his heart. ‘I have no interest in the emperor’s position.’

The emperor understood the unspoken meaning behind Pei Jin’s words, ‘I don’t want the throne. I’ve given up military power and wasted my earnings. I wish to be a carefree prince. Why would I need to kill my father and brothers?’

The emperor saw Pei Jin’s straight back while Pei Jin knelt and noticed Pei Jin was no longer shocked and fearful like earlier. The emperor slitted his eyes at the eyesore in front of him, he realised he had never been able to see through Pei Jin.

The emperor’s heart knew clearly which two princes were battling for the throne. But those two princes had strengths that satisfied his expectations and weaknesses that he couldn’t tolerate. It was hard for him to choose between the two without seeing their true hearts.

So the emperor ordered Wang Fu Mu to sacrifice some assassins at the harvest festival banquet and chose the seating arrangements for the three princes. He truly wanted to know when he was in danger, who would save him. But two assassins from Southern Jiang turned his plan into chaos. Although seventh prince saved him, it wasn’t the result he wanted.

The emperor wanted to know who dared to send those two assassins into the palace! The imperial guards investigated the two assassins’ backgrounds, but nothing certain was discovered.

The emperor knew the assassins attacking him, the crown prince and ninth

prince would make seventh prince the first suspect. But he knew seventh prince wouldn't use such an obvious tactic. Besides, seventh prince wouldn't risk dying to save him if seventh prince sent those assassins.

The emperor thought about the crown prince being attacked to frame seventh prince. Especially the crown prince's mother, the empress saw seventh prince as her biggest eyesore and could have sent the assassins to the palace. So he summoned the crown prince to interrogate the crown prince. But he didn't expect the crown prince knelt and dared to say, 'Imperial father if you suspect me then take away my crown prince status.'

The emperor broke his favorite ink stone the moment he heard the crown prince easily threatened to forfeit a privilege position and he felt like the blood in his body flowed backward. In that moment he could have used a sword to stab the crown prince to death! He felt like he wasted many years to train the crown prince.

Of course the third suspect was ninth prince. The emperor received a report from the imperial guards' investigation, 'the assassins are soldiers from Southern Jiang and are acquainted with ninth prince.'

A long time past but Pei Jin remained kneeling with his back straight while the emperor's dagger eyes watched Pei Jin closely.

'You can stand!' the emperor said.

Pei Jin bowed his head and stood unsteadily. Wang Fu Mu rushed to him and helped him stand.

'Thank you official Wang,' Pei Jin said.

The emperor's heart was moved when he saw the blood stains on Pei Jin's knees and on the shattered stone pieces on the floor.

'At that time, your first reaction was to protect your wife,' the emperor said in a gentler tone.

Pei Jin's father's sudden words startled Pei Jin but he nodded his head and he saw his father's eyes became clouded.

'At that time, beside you was the crown prince and your thirteenth brother,'

the emperor said.

‘Everything happened suddenly,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I didn’t have time to think. I hope imperial father can forgive me.’

The emperor understood Pei Jin’s unspoken explanation, ‘I followed my instincts and protected what was most important in my heart.’

‘You can go home,’ the emperor said. ‘You’re a newly wedded man, be happy with your wife.’ He paused for a while. ‘The little girl Shi Ning isn’t bad. In a life and death situation she still wanted to protect Xiao Khan.’

Last night while the emperor was attacked, he carefully assessed the princes’ reactions first. Afterward he noticed Shi Ning hugged Pei Khan tightly then Pei Jin stood in front of them and protected them.

After Pei Jin left the Chi Ruan chamber the emperor sighed and looked at Wang Fu Mu. ‘Find something valuable to send to ninth prince’s manor.’

‘Yes your majesty,’ Wang Fu Mu said. ‘Your majesty never suspected ninth prince then why did you interrogated him in that way?’

Wang Fu Mu saw the emperor only smiled after the emperor read the imperial guards’ report. He knew Pei Jin wouldn’t leave such an obvious trail. Besides, Pei Jin wouldn’t benefit anything from the assassination attempt. He was certain someone purposely wanted to frame Pei Jin. But he didn’t expect the emperor to interrogate Pei Jin in such a ruthless manner.

The emperor stared at the door in deep thought. ‘Out of my sons, he is the hardest one to see through. I wanted to know what ninth prince is thinking inside his heart.’

Wan Fu Mu understood the emperor’s heart had never been at ease toward ninth prince.

‘Perhaps ninth prince’s heart never had that desire,’ Wang Fu Mu said cautiously.

The emperor’s eyes darkened and Wang Fu Mu’s body shook. ‘Your majesty, forgive me for saying too much.’

Outside the palace gates Pei Jin smiled coldly and limped slightly into the horse

carriage.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Two (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***



# part 1



## Chapter Twenty-Three (Part 1)

A rumor spread throughout the Dian Kingdom about the assassination attempt in the palace.

Some citizens speculated a foolish enemy kingdom dared to send assassins to kill their emperor and princes. Their purpose was to seize the kingdom. Those citizens heard the emperor ordered the northern army to move back thirty li and seize three territories of an enemy kingdom.

Other citizens gossiped about how seventh prince heroically used his body to save the emperor. They thought although seventh prince was stabbed, he was also the person who benefited the most from the assassination attempt.

In the palace, seventh prince was recovering in bed while Consort Mu took care of his injury. Seventh prince and Consort Mu's servants reported to them about the rumors spread outside the palace. Seventh prince and Consort Mu smiled with each other and they rewarded their servants.

The crown prince's supporters were worried about seventh prince's heroic reputation so they spread a rumor outside the palace that seventh prince was the person who sent the assassins to the palace.

In contrast to the chaos in the palace, the atmosphere inside Pei Jin's manor was tranquil.

Since the day Pei Jin returned from the Chi Ruan chamber he followed his

father's order and stayed home with Yan Shi Ning. Of course he stayed home while Yan Shi Ning was in an inconvenienced state otherwise he would have taken her sightseeing.

That morning Pei Jin was sitting in Bei Dou's chamber and rubbing a herbal remedy on his knees. The shattered stone pieces pierced through his knees deeper than expected.

'It appears it'll leave a scar,' Pei Jin said.

'Why won't you more attentive that day?' Bei Dou asked.

'If I didn't kneel on the shattered stone pieces then how can I feign shock that day?' Pei Jin asked. 'Isn't it good that I'm learning from seventh brother's tactic? Besides, I'm happy I got to see how worried little lion was about me.'

Pei Jin remembered that day he returned home from the palace, Yan Shi Ning saw the blood stains on his knees and she was worried enough for her soul to float away.

'I didn't think Pei Zhang would use his body to save the emperor,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin pulled his pants down and stood to wash his hands. 'Seventh brother was certain he wouldn't die. A shallow stab isn't going to harm his healthy body.'

'It's a pity he was rewarded,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin smiled. 'That's uncertain.'

'Why?' Bei Dou asked suspiciously.

'My imperial father isn't a fool,' Pei Jin said. 'Imperial father saw that seventh brother could have easily pushed the sword away but seventh brother chose to let the sword stab him. It's a pity imperial father hates other people acting in front of him the most. Seventh brother's heroic display was only rewarded by imperial father's disdain. Imperial father is naturally a suspicious person. It looks like he is favoring seventh brother by letting seventh brother stay in the palace to recover... but imperial father purposely detained seventh brother in the palace to make it easier for him to investigate who sent the assassins. If seventh brother had behaved and focused on recovering in the palace, he would have earned imperial father's trust... a pity Consort Mu impatiently sent servants to

spread news about seventh brother's heroic deed and made imperial father more suspicious of seventh brother.'

Bei Dou listened to Pei Jin's explanation and he realised his assumptions were naive.

'The crown prince is more intelligent than seventh prince,' Pei Jin said. 'After the assassination attempt the crown prince acted like his body's weak and stayed in the Eastern chamber to rest. It made the empress angry enough to break off fingernails. I'm uncertain whether the crown prince is truly giving up his position or if he's waiting for a good opportunity to retaliate.'

'If you had let me enter the palace to assassinate the crown prince then you wouldn't be as troubled as you are now,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin knew if he had let Bei Dou wield a sword at the palace that day then the crown prince would no longer be under the same sky as them.

'Bei Dou, I didn't send the two assassins to kill people,' Pei Jin said.

'Then what was the purpose?' Bei Dou asked.

Pei Jin looked out the window and he saw the cloudy sky and the palace in the distance. 'I merely wanted them to be in a chaotic state. If imperial father is more suspicious of them then they would be too busy retreating to cause trouble for me. Indeed being a carefree prince isn't bad.'

Pei Jin picked up a fan Yan Shi Ning gave him and waved it in front of him to blow away the worries in his head.

Of course Bei Dou didn't believe Pei Jin's simple reason. According to the news Bei Dou received, the emperor was suspicious of seventh prince and the crown prince. The emperor also demoted all the court officials that were secretly cooperating with Huang Guo. That news startled him. He realised if Pei Jin had listened to his advice and cooperated with Huang Guo then no one in Pei Jin's manor would be safe.

'You knew long ago the emperor was suspicious of Huang Guo's motives,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin looked at the words beautifully embroidered on the fan and smiled. 'In

the past I wasn't certain but after imperial father demoted their positions, it confirmed my intuition. Twelve years ago Huang Guo's sudden resignation would make people suspicious.'

Bei Dou thought that Pei Jin's strategic skills were better than he expected.

'I'm going back to my chamber to play with the little lion,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin walked to the door but he remembered something he forgot to ask Bei Dou and turned his head around to face Bei Dou. 'I almost forgot why I came here.'

Bei Dou was curious what else Pei Jin wanted to discuss.

'Honestly, how long does a woman's inconvenience time last?' Pei Jin asked. 'Last time I asked, you said it lasts for four to five days. But it's past six days, why isn't my wife well?'

Bei Dou glared at Pei Jin, he wanted to vomit blood. Heavens! What was he? A woman? How was he supposed to know? He brushed his sleeves to vent his anger and left his chamber.

Pei Jin watched Bei Dou leave in an angry state. Afterward he rubbed his chin and realised the little lion wasn't inconvenienced.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Three (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Twenty-Three (Part 2 of 2)

Pei Jin bought many books for Yan Shi Ning.

The books were all about nature. In the last six days Yan Shi Ning did open the books and read. She read books about love stories hidden behind the nature books... it was troublesome being a prince's wife, she couldn't let other people see her reading love stories.

Yan Shi Ning was absorbed in another love story when she felt someone entered the chamber. She raised her head and saw Pei Jin was holding a cuju ball (Chinese football).

'Wife, you can play with it,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning frowned at the cuju. What was she? A three-year-old?

'What's good about it?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin feigned surprise. 'Little lion, shouldn't you be happy you get to hold a cuju?'

Yan Shi Ning wasn't happy.

Pei Jin soothed the angry Yan Shi Ning. 'Alright, I was teasing you. Messengers of the dressmaker Su delivered dresses here, come here and see the dresses.'

'Why are there more dresses?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Didn't I promise you there'll be many more dresses?' Pei Jin asked.

After Yan Shi Ning opened three big chests and two small chests, she was shocked to see many dresses, shoes, makeup and jewellery. Heavens! It was enough for her to wear for many years. Also, one glance and she knew they were all expensive.

More chests were brought into the chamber and Yan Shi Ning couldn't restrain her shock.

'Big brother, you're insane!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin laughed. 'It's hard to be insane a few times while alive.'

Yan Shi Ning couldn't believe what she saw. In her memories Pei Jin was an excessively frugal person. In the past if he wanted to buy dried dates, he would trick her to use her money to buy dried dates. So his sudden generosity made her suspicious a demon possessed his body.

Yan Shi Ning admitted that everything inside the chests were beautiful... until she opened a chest of undergarments and her face turned red. They were too thin and would expose too much skin. If a person wore them, it would be the same if they didn't wear undergarments.

'Big brother, why did you buy... them?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin looked innocently at Yan Shi Ning. 'It's not my fault. I asked the dressmaker to choose the best fabrics. I didn't know the fabric quality would be this good.'

Pei Jin's heart laughed happily. He asked the dressmaker to choose the thinnest fabrics to make Yan Shi Ning's undergarments. After seeing them, he was satisfied the fabrics were thinner than his expectations.

Yan Shi Ning saw the bright gleam in Pei Jin's eyes and she realised he was the one who instructed what fabrics to use. How could such a person exist? Her heart cursed him, 'if you want to buy them then buy as many as you want. There's nothing you can do if it's not worn.'

Pei Jin's heart saw through Yan Shi Ning's heart, 'It'll be hard for them to not to be worn.'

That night Yan Shi Ning was weary while she was bathing. Indeed that person

came to watch her bathe like he did the other nights. She slowly lowered her body under the flowers petals and ignored him.

Pei Jin was a little disappointed only Yan Shi Ning's head was visible above the flower petals. But his purpose that night wasn't to see a spring scenery. He clasped his hands behind his back and circled the bath tub once and he silently returned to the bed.

Yan Shi Ning was suspicious. Usually Pei Jin would tease her while she was bathing. But that night he changed his habit.

'Wife, I'm going to the calligraphy room,' Pei Jin said. 'I forgot I left something there.'

Yan Shi Ning pouted her lips. Who would care about where that person wanted to go?

After the water turned cold, Yan Shi Ning wanted to get out of the bath tub. She reached for her clothes... they were gone!

Yan Shi Ning remembered earlier Pei Jin walked suspiciously around the bath tub while hiding his hands behind his back... he took her clothes and replaced them with the thin undergarments.

Yan Shi Ning gritted her teeth. Her heart wanted to curse and whip him a hundred times, 'Pei Jin, you scoundrel!'

Yan Shi Ning didn't wear the undergarments. She got out of the bath tub and ran to the bed since Pei Jin was in the calligraphy room.

Unfortunately Pei Jin was lying on the bed and smiling lecherously at Yan Shi Ning.

'Wife, why are you dressed like this?' Pei Jin asked. 'Do you want to seduce your husband? But your husband is a gentleman.'

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End of Chapter Twenty-Three (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Twenty-Four



A frog at the bottom of a well – marriage is like a frog at the bottom of a well, it can drink water but can't get out of the well (Chinese proverb).

A watched flower never blooms – follow love and it will flee but flee love and it will follow (Chinese proverb).

HBAG – Chapter Twenty-Four has mature content. If reader is not of a matured age flee chapter twenty-four and follow onto chapter twenty-five.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Pei Jin's eyes ate Yan Shi Ning's smooth skin, tempting collar bone and two peach nipples. He hardened faster than he jumped off the bed.

Pei Jin's arms gripped Yan Shi Ning's waist and he kissed her before she could answer him.

Yan Shi Ning stepped back away from Pei Jin, but he pulled her closer and he kissed her fiercely. Behind her was a table, she had nowhere to retreat. His lips were like their master, salvage and forceful. She tilted her head back and propped her hands on the table to stop her unsteady legs from collapsing. He held her tightly until she could feel his hardness.

Pei Jin's lips released Yan Shi Ning's swollen lips and kissed down to her tempting collar bone. His teeth didn't resist and bit her collar bone.

Yan Shi Ning's head spun after Pei Jin's kiss. Then she felt a sudden sharp pain



on her collar bone.

‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Pei Jin smiled like a demon and his tongue licked the teeth mark on her collar bone.

‘Wife, you admit biting a person hurts,’ Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning was about to retort but her body felt lighter, she was in Pei Jin’s arms and he carried her onto the bed.

‘I, I... it’s inconvenient,’ Yan Shi Ning lied.

‘Alright, let your husband check for you,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning panicked while Pei Jin’s hand moved below her stomach. She held onto his hand, the heavens knew she stopped bleeding a day ago but she wanted to fool him.

‘Wife, what are you doing?’ Pei Jin asked and looked accusingly at Yan Shi Ning’s hands.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t laugh or cry.

‘Wife, you dare lie to me?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘I’ll show you what happens when you lie to me.’

Pei Jin rolled Yan Shi Ning on her stomach and he bit the sensitive spot on her lower back. During the nights he kissed everywhere on her body and he discovered the most responsive part of her body was a spot on her lower back. One light touch there on her lower back and he would feel her body shake.

Pei Jin patiently waited for Yan Shi Ning, but she lied to him so he abandoned his patience.

Yan Shi Ning was lying on her stomach and she couldn’t move her body. Pei Jin swept her hair over her head. She couldn’t turn her head around, she could only feel his warm lips kissed her shoulder and slowly down on her back. His hands gently stroked her back while his teeth bit and his tongue soothed the bitten spots on her back. The tingly itch on her back quickly spread to the rest of her body and she moaned. After she felt the pressure on her back lightened she arched her back.

Pei Jin heard Yan Shi Ning's moan and he smiled. He bit her neck, his left wrist kneaded small circles on her waist and his right hand slid from her neck to her soft breasts. His fingers teased her two peach nipples that ripened under his fingers and he heard her moaned loudly.

Pei Jin rolled Yan Shi Ning onto her back. Her face was flushed red like the flesh of a gac fruit. Her eyes were misty as fog.

Pei Jin smiled and pinched Yan Shi Ning's flushed cheek. 'Let's begin our wedding night.'

Pei Jin began to take off his clothes.

Yan Shi Ning's heart pounded chaotically and her head continued to spin. She gasped for air while watching Pei Jin take off his clothes. On the night they bathed together, he was naked but she didn't get a chance to carefully look at his naked body. But she didn't expect the spring scenery in front of her to be that hard and desirable.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin was a handsome man with clothes on, but without clothes he was more handsome and could easily trap a person in a trance.

'Wife, your intense leering is making your husband shy,' Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning awoken from Pei Jin's trance and she realised they were both naked.

'I... I...' Yan Shi Ning said incoherently in her nervous state.

Pei Jin's body pressed down onto Yan Shi Ning's body and his hands clasped her hands. He blew on her red soft lips and he reassured her. 'Wife, don't be nervous. I'll take care of you.'

Pei Jin's lips kissed the red soft lips he loved the most.

'Umm...' Yan Shi Ning moaned.

Pei Jin's tongue mingled with Yan Shi Ning's tongue and numbed her mouth. She arched her body up, moaned and his kiss deepened.

Yan Shi Ning's head spun faster and in the midst of the chaos she felt Pei Jin's hardness between her thighs. She pressed her thighs tightly together and her nervousness returned.

‘Wife, don’t move,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Let me pleasure you first so later when I enter you won’t feel pain.’

Pei Jin didn’t want Yan Shi Ning to feel pain so he prolonged satisfying his desire.

Pei Jin’s fingers were stroking inside Yan Shi Ning’s sensitive spot between her thighs as though his finger strokes were a thousand worms were wiggling. His mouth swallowed her loud moan.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning’s whole body trembled underneath his body. Afterward her body tensed and relaxed. He withdrew his fingers, saw them covered with her sweet dew and knew it was the right opportunity to enter her.

Pei Jin parted Yan Shi Ning’s thighs and his hardness thrust inside the sweetness between her thighs.

‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Yan Shi Ning felt like a sword stabbed between her thighs. Her forehead creased and tears flowed down her cheeks.

Pei Jin’s face muscles tensed and his lips softly kissed Yan Shi Ning’s cheeks.

‘Bear the pain a little longer,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin’s hardness slowly moved deeper inside Yan Shi Ning.

‘Ah, ah, it hurts!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t remember anything about being a gentle lady and she cried loudly like a little child.

Pei Jin’s heart ached after seeing Yan Shi Ning’s tears of pain. He kissed her lips and consoled her. ‘Soon it won’t hurt anymore.’

‘Ah, can you stop?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t bear the excruciating pain and she cried louder.

Pei Jin wiped the tears off Yan Shi Ning’s face and his hands clasped her hands tightly. ‘Shi Ning, I waited for a long time, don’t ask me to wait longer.’

While Yan Shi Ning was distracted, Pei Jin withdrew and thrust hard into her body...

Yan Shi Ning didn't know when she fell asleep, but after she woke up she felt her whole naked body ached and a naked Pei Jin slept peacefully beside her.

Yan Shi Ning remembered about what happened before she slept and she blushed. She looked at Pei Jin, they were finally husband and wife and felt like everything was insanely beautiful.

In the past Yan Shi Ning thought about who she would marry, but she never thought she would marry Pei Jin. Although he used to tease her and said he would marry her when she was an adult, she never believed him. After he was betrothed to another woman, she was happy she could escape him. She never expected after circling each other, he would run to her and marry her.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ning felt something was suspicious. She felt like Pei Jin always wanted to eat her, but she didn't understand why he didn't eat her on their wedding night. Did he wanted to wait for her until she would be willing? But if she didn't fool him then he would have eaten her earlier. She realised he fooled her again! She grabbed his hand and bit his hand.

Pei Jin felt someone bit his hand and woke up. He saw Yan Shi Ning's angry face and he laughed.

'Wife, why are you angry?' Pei Jin asked. 'Is it because you're not satisfied with your husband's performance?'

Weariness replaced Yan Shi Ning's anger and she shook her head.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and kissed her forehead. 'Today I can't eat you otherwise you'll feel pain.'

Yan Shi Ning blushed and she sighed in relief.

'Be patient and wait until tomorrow,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning widened her eyes.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning's weariness, shook his head and he sighed. The heavens knew that day he wasn't satisfied with only eating her once. But he knew she was a fierce little demoness and he needed to slowly persuade her to accept her fate.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Four

***Related***

## part 1



### Chapter Twenty-Five (Part 1)

Yan Shi Ning slept through the rest of the night.

The following morning Yan Shi Ning woke up and didn't see Pei Jin. She asked a maid to prepare a water basin for her to wash her face then she changed into a dress.

After Yan Shi Ning washed and dressed, she slowly walked toward the gardens. It was still painful between her legs, but she didn't want the maids to know what happened and forced herself to straighten her back.

Yan Shi Ning circled the gardens and returned to her chamber but she didn't see Pei Jin.

'Where's ninth prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked a maid.

'Mistress, ninth prince is visiting Gentleman Bei,' the maid said.

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head and she remembered the physician Bei Dou who wore black clothes and a stiff expression on his face.

Yan Shi Ning felt that Bei Dou had a cold aura. She thought that even someone

cold would have a face that at least occasionally changed expressions. But each time she met him, his face stayed the same stiff expression. It made her curious about his real identity and why Pei Jin treated him sincerely.

Yan Shi Ning didn't ask Pei Jin about Bei Dou. She knew Pei Jin had many secrets. But she was happy to be Pei Jin's wife who ate and slept. Suddenly she felt hungry and was about to ask a maid to bring her food from the kitchen but Pei Jin entered their chamber with a platter of food.

'Wife, why aren't you sleeping?' Pei Jin asked and put the bowl of beef congee and the bowl of cong you bings on a table.

The delicious fragrance brightened Yan Shi Ning's eyes. After the maids left the chamber, she tucked a cong you bing in her mouth. While she was chewing, the pain between her legs increased and she took deep breaths.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning frowned. 'Wife, what's wrong?'

'It hurts!' Yan Shi Ning said and looked at Pei Jin accusingly.

Pei Jin laughed and carried Yan Shi Ning onto the bed.

'What do you want to do?' Yan Shi Ning asked wearily.

Yan Shi Ning swallowed the cong you bing in her mouth and looked at Pei Jin suspiciously. Outside the window the sky was still bright, she didn't know how he could shamelessly want to eat her.

Pei Jin lifted Yan Shi Ning's dress and took off her pants and undergarments while smiling shadily at her.

Yan Shi Ning pulled down her dress and she scrunched her face like an angry bore. 'You... you... it's still morning.'

'Wife, does that mean... if it isn't morning then it's alright?' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin took out a jade bottle from his pouch and poured some of the herbal remedy on his fingers.

Yan Shi Ning remembered Pei Jin's fingers teased her body last night and she wanted to hit him. Then she was curious about the sweet scent from the herbal remedy on his fingers. 'What is that?'

‘It’s good,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning’s hands away from her dress and inserted his fingers between her legs.

Yan Shi Ning’s whole body stiffened the moment she felt his fingers inside her.

‘Wife, you don’t need to be nervous,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I’m only rubbing the herbal remedy inside to soothe the pain.’

Pei Jin wanted to continue teasing Yan Shi Ning, but he saw her anxiously bit her lower lip and decided to be honest.

Pei Jin remembered Yan Shi Ning cried out in pain throughout the night so earlier in the morning he woke Bei Dou up. He ignored Bei Dou’s resentment for being woken up too early and asked Bei Dou for a herbal remedy. Bei Dou didn’t ask him what kind of herbal remedy he wanted instead Bei Dou’s forehead to the neck turned red. Then Bei Dou wrote the name of the herbal remedy on a paper and told him to go buy it.

Yan Shi Ning’s body relaxed after Pei Jin explained the purpose of the herbal remedy. But she felt a strange sensation having his fingers gently stroked inside her and her body stiffened again.

‘I... I... can do it myself,’ Yan Shi Ning stuttered.

‘Wife, can you see where the sore spots are?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning bit her lower lip. She did feel shy about inserting her fingers inside herself. But it was better than having his fingers inside her.

Yan Shi Ning held onto Pei Jin’s arms. ‘I can do it myself.’

‘Alright, you can do it yourself,’ Pei Jin said. His fingers circled inside her one more time and withdrew. ‘But I finished putting it on the sore spots.’

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin’s rotten smile.

Pei Jin pulled out a handkerchief and consoled Yan Shi Ning while he wiped his fingers. ‘Wife, don’t be sad. We can’t this time, but there’ll be a next time soon.’

Yan Shi Ning’s heart cursed Pei Jin, ‘Sad your sister!’

Yan Shi Ning put on her undergarments and pants then she kicked Pei Jin off



the bed.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning off the bed with him. She fell on top of him. Then he rolled her under him and she opened her mouth but his mouth swallowed her curse.

Earlier Pei Jin felt frustrated while his fingers were inside Yan Shi Ning's body. He thought it wasn't right that a delicious meat was in front of him but he had to endure. He wondered when he could eat to his satisfaction.

Pei Jin thought one day soon he needed to be a bandit and pluck Yan Shi Ning otherwise he feared he would die from starving himself.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin kissed her long enough to make her forget to breathe. She noticed the bowl of congee on the table and pushed him off her.

'The congee will be cold soon,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin knew if he continued kissing Yan Shi Ning, it would be hard for him to stop so he let her push him off her.

Yan Shi Ning happily ate the bowl of delicious beef congee and occasionally bit a cong you bing.

'Did you change the head cook of your manor?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'Why does the food taste better than usual?'

Yan Shi Ning finished eating the whole bowl of beef congee. Then she remembered since she arrived at Pei Jin's manor, the cooks' food weren't as delicious as the cooks' food at the Yan Manor. It wasn't a surprise because Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting used a lot of money to hire a cook from a famous restaurant in the imperial city. But she was surprised the food Pei Jin bought earlier tasted better than the cooks' food at the Yan Manor.

Pei Jin was happy Yan Shi Ning liked the food he bought for her. But he knocked her forehead after he heard her said 'your manor.'

'Wife, what is the head cook of your manor?' Pei Jin asked. 'Do you still see yourself as an outsider?'

Yan Shi Ning rubbed her sore forehead and glared at Pei Jin. But she admitted she wasn't used to thinking of herself as the mistress of Pei Jin's manor.

‘The cooks in our home didn’t make these dishes,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I bought it at Fu Qing on the way to buy the herbal remedy.’

The mention of ‘Fu Qing’ brightened Yan Shi Ning’s eyes. Before she arrived at the imperial city, she heard of Fu Qing, the best restaurant in the imperial city. After she lived in the Yan Manor, she never had the opportunity to eat at Fu Qing. She was happy she got to wear clothes from Su’s dressmakers and eat food from Fu Qing.

Pei Jin saw the excitement on Yan Shi Ning’s face and he rubbed his chin. ‘Wife, do you want to go there?’

Yan Shi Ning looked suspiciously at Pei Jin. ‘Can we actually go there?’

‘Wife, do you want to see the singers and musicians perform?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Yes,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Alright, then we can go,’ Pei Jin said.

On the way to Fu Qing, Yan Shi Ning thought about a childhood memory inside the horse carriage. That year a group of singers and musicians visited Xuan Qing to perform. Other children her age had their mothers take them to see the singers and musicians perform. She wanted to go too but her mother didn’t have enough money and her precious pouch was light as a cat’s whisker. In her sad state, Pei Jin stood in front of her and asked, ‘Do you want to see the singers and musicians perform?’

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t ignore Pei Jin after she heard his question and she foolishly nodded her head. Afterward he actually did take her to see the singers and musicians perform. But they didn’t buy tickets at the entrance like other people... they climbed a wall.

That night was cold but Yan Shi Ning’s heart was warm. She sat on the wall and saw the singers and musicians perform on a platform while she ate dried dates. That day she thought life was beautiful... of course if that thief didn’t steal a copper coin from her precious pouch to buy the dried dates then life would have been more beautiful.

‘Little sister, I took you to see the singers and musicians perform,’ that thief said. ‘But why haven’t you thanked me?’

Yan Shi Ning's childhood memory from that year reminded her to be weary of Pei Jin.

‘Did you bring enough money?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning was worried Pei Jin was taking her to climb another wall.

Pei Jin looked at the Yan Shi Ning dressed in a man's clothes and wanted to laugh because she couldn't disguise her feminine beauty. He pulled out a paper note worth one thousand silver taels and put it inside her inner robe. ‘I don't have silver taels. Wife, you'll be the host.’

Yan Shi Ning was shocked to see the paper note... how rich was Pei Jin?

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End of Chapter Twenty-Five (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Twenty-Five (Part 2 of 2)

Pei Jin took Yan Shi Ning for a stroll around the imperial city.

The streets were crowded with people, there were many sights to see and food to taste. Yan Shi Ning thought she could relax after leaving the manor with Pei Jin. But two of Pei Jin's guards followed them around the imperial city so she was forced to act like a gentleman in her disguise.

Pei Jin noticed Yan Shi Ning's reluctance to move around freely.

'Guards, you don't need to follow us,' Pei Jin said to his guards. 'You can go find a place to drink wine.'

Yan Shi Ning began to worry a little after the guards left. 'Is it safe? What if there are assassins?'

Before Yan Shi Ning left the manor, she hesitated to leave because of the

assassination attempt in the palace. But Pei Jin reassured her and brought guards with them outside the manor.

Pei Jin didn't know what to explain to Yan Shi Ning to reassure her. What was he supposed to say? Wife, don't worry two of those assassins were sent by your husband?

After thinking for a while Pei Jin chose the most tactful explanation to reassure Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, don't worry there are guards secretly following us.'

Half of Yan Shi Ning believed and the half of her suspected Pei Jin's explanation. But if there were guards secretly following them then she could continue to play on the streets.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning continued sightseeing until she noticed someone familiar. She held onto his arm to stop him.

'Who does that person look like?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin's eyes followed Yan Shi Ning's gaze. He saw a familiar woman walk out of a medicine shop and the woman held a bundle.

'Widow Li?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning was happy Pei Jin recognised widow Li too and that her eyes weren't mistaken.

Pei Jin was happy Yan Shi Ning was holding his arm. She was pulling him in the direction of widow Li.

After Widow Li bought the medicine, she began walking home with a heavy conscience. Her conscience became heavier the moment she saw who stood in front of her and her face paled.

'Mistress Yan,' widow Li said.

Yan Shi Ning looked happy to see widow Li. But Pei Jin didn't understand why widow Li looked scared to see Yan Shi Ning.

'Widow Li, didn't you say you were travelling south?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'Why are you in the imperial city?'

Widow Li pretended to fix her hair to think of a reasonable explanation. 'I... I

was planning to visit my older cousin in the south. But he said he wanted to be a merchant in the imperial city so I came here with him.'

'If you're in the imperial city why didn't you look for me?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'I... I can't be that shameless to look for you,' widow Li said.

'Let's find a place to sit and talk,' Pei Jin said.

'Uh, no I have somewhere I need to be,' widow Li declined.

Pei Jin glanced at the bulky bundle of medicine widow Li was carrying.

'Widow Li, why did you need to buy a lot of medicine?' Pei Jin asked.

Widow Li sighed sadly. 'My older cousin is ill. Mistress Yan, ninth prince, I'll leave first. I need to prepare the medicine for him.'

Widow Li hurriedly left without waiting for Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin's reply.

Yan Shi Ning looked at widow Li's back and frowned. 'Pei Jin, do you think that widow Li has changed?'

Pei Jin was relieved Yan Shi Ning noticed the change in widow Li's personality too.

'Perhaps something has happened,' Pei Jin said. 'I forgot, Bei Dou asked me to buy some medicine for him. Wife, wait for me here. I'll go inside to buy the medicine and I'll come out soon.'

Pei Jin walked into the shop and requested to see the shop owner.

'What medicine did the woman who came into your shop earlier buy?' Pei Jin asked.

The shop owner told Pei Jin what medicine widow Li bought and it made Pei Jin more uneasy.

Pei Jin knew the medicine widow Li bought were expensive. Widow Li was wearing ordinary clothes, he didn't understand how she could afford to buy expensive medicine. Also, the shop owner said that she was a regular customer who had been buying the same medicine for many months. He wondered where widow Li would find more than one thousand silver taels to buy the medicine frequently.

Pei Jin remembered widow Li’s panicked expression the moment widow Li saw Yan Shi Ning and his intuition warned him that something was wrong. He decided after he returned to the manor, he would ask some of his guards to wait nearby the medicine shop and secretly follow widow Li.

Pei Jin thought if widow Li was in trouble, he would help widow Li because widow Li was important to Yan Shi Ning. But if widow Li was hiding a dangerous secret involving Yan Shi Ning then he would be prepared to stop widow Li from harming Yan Shi Ning.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Five (Part 2)

***Related***



## Twenty-Six



### Chapter Twenty-Six

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning stood in front of Fu Qing's three entrances.

Fu Qing was separated into three terraces and each terrace had three floors.

'Why does Fu Qing have more than one entrance?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'Which entrance do we walk through?'

'Wife, which entrance do you want to walk through?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning heard lively songs and the sounds of instruments from the left terrace. 'I want to walk through the left entrance.'

'Wife, it's not suitable for you to walk through the left entrance,' Pei Jin said.

'Why?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin whispered something in Yan Shi Ning's ear and she blushed. 'That kind of place exists?'

Pei Jin nodded his head innocently like he heard that place existed but never



been inside.

‘What about the middle entrance?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘It’s where proper food is served,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning looked at the right door and she smiled playfully. ‘Then there must be handsome food behind the right entrance.’

Pei Jin had a strange feeling.

Indeed Pei Jin followed Yan Shi Ning through the right entrance. He silently asked the heavens to not let him meet anyone that knew him. If people found out gentle ninth prince visited those kind of places, he feared everyone would be shocked enough for their chins to fall.

‘I’m here to play with handsome beauties,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

A man dressed in black clothes embroidered with flowers greeted Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin then the man escorted them to the stairs.

Yan Shi Ning was happy to be surrounded by beauties. The beauties were all young men who had pink lips, white teeth and were friendly.

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning’s waist. ‘Have you leered enough?’

Yan Shi Ning glared at Pei Jin, pulled out a fan and she waved it in front of her face. ‘Of course I haven’t.’

Yan Shi Ning looked at her surroundings and she noticed most of the guests walked to the second floor. So she walked to the second floor too.

A man who greeted guests on the second floor thought Yan Shi Ning was a regular guest by the way Yan Shi Ning confidently walked to the second floor.

‘Master, are you looking for someone familiar?’ the man asked.

Yan Shi Ning thought the handsome man looked about thirty years old who had a soothing voice.

‘Someone familiar?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

The man saw Yan Shi Ning looked confusedly at Pei Jin. He realised they were new guests and assumed Pei Jin was the guest who carried a heavy pouch.

Pei Jin draped an arm over Yan Shi Ning's shoulder.

'No need, take us to a free room,' Pei Jin said.

A guest interrupted them and passed the man a paper note worth fifty silver taels. 'Gentleman Chen, tonight I want Yue Feng to serve me.'

Gentleman Chen accepted the paper note and gave the guest Yue Feng's plaque.

Yan Shi Ning saw the guest and Gentleman Chen's exchange and she understood what someone familiar meant.

Yan Shi Ning took out one of the ten paper notes worth one hundred silver taels that she exchanged earlier at a pawn shop and gave it to Gentleman Chen. 'I... we... Gentleman Chen make arrangements for us.'

Pei Jin thought Yan Shi Ning learned bad habits fast.

Gentleman Chen accepted Yan Shi Ning's paper note, gave Feng Su and Yu Lu's plaques to Yan Shi Ning and escorted Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin to a room.

Inside the room was two beds, paintings of handsome men and a marble table. On the table was a vase, a small fragrant pouch, a tea pot and cups.

Yan Shi Ning stared at a painting of a handsome man for too long, Pei Jin pulled the painting off the wall and threw it on the ground.

'What are you doing?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Wife, can't you see your husband is more handsome?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin from the top of his head to his feet. 'I can't see.'

Pei Jin regretted taking Yan Shi Ning outside the manor.

Yan Shi Ning was amused to see Pei Jin was frustrated to death.

Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin were drinking tea on a bed when Feng Su and Yu Lu entered the room.

Yan Shi Ning put her cup of tea on the nearby marble table. She thought the two young men looked sixteen years old. Their long hair were straight and smooth like a thin fabric, a red flower was painted in the middle of their foreheads and their steps were dainty.

Pei Jin noticed Yan Shi Ning's mouth and eyes widened. He wondered why he didn't discover she was a pervert long ago. Then he wondered why she didn't perve at him in the past. He compared himself to the two young men and thought she must love to perve on handsome weaklings.

Feng Su knelt in front of Yan Shi Ning. 'Master, Feng Su is here to serve you.'

Yu Lu knelt in front of Pei Jin. 'Master, Yu Lu is here to serve you.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't have experience in that kind of situation and felt uncomfortable. But she saw Pei Jin gave her a 'coming here doesn't suit you' look so she straightened her back.

Yan Shi Ning used a fan to lift Feng Su's chin. 'How do you want to serve me?'

Pei Jin spat tea out of his mouth.

Yu Lu quickly pulled out a handkerchief and wanted to wipe the tea off Pei Jin's face. But Yu Lu's body was too close to Pei Jin's body and Pei Jin politely declined.

'I can do it myself,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin glared at Feng Su. If Feng Su dared to touch Yan Shi Ning's body, he vowed to toss Feng Su out the window.

Luckily Feng Su didn't touch Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Master, however you want me to serve you.'

Goose bumps rose on Yan Shi Ning's whole body. 'Alright.'

In that moment a fuwu brought a platter of food and wine jars into the room.

At the sight of food and wine Yan Shi Ning ignored the handsome beauties in the room. She was about to pick up a pair chopsticks but Feng Su was faster.

Feng Su held a prawn between chopsticks in front of Yan Shi Ning's mouth. 'Master, I'll serve you.'

Yan Shi Ning glanced at Pei Jin. Although he was smiling at her, she knew his smile was a threat, 'Wife, do you dare to eat?'

Yan Shi Ning smiled at Pei Jin and opened her mouth.

Pei Jin angrily picked up the cup of wine Yu Lu poured and drank it.

Yan Shi Ning sniffed the wine fragrance and thought it smelt sweeter than fruits.

‘Beauty, pour wine for your master,’ Yan Shi Ning said and touched Feng Su’s smooth hand.

Pei Jin’s heart wanted to cut off Yan Shi Ning’s hand after they returned to the manor. He drank another cup of wine.

Yu Lu noticed the cold deadly aura around Pei Jin and quickly poured more wine into Pei Jin’s cup.

Feng Su raised a cup of wine to Yan Shi Ning’s lips. ‘Master, this is Tan Hua Tu. It’s Fu Qing’s best wine.’

Yan Shi Ning drank the cup of wine and nodded her head. ‘It’s good wine.’

‘Master, drink slowly,’ Feng Su said.

Pei Jin gritted his teeth after he saw Feng Su’s chest nearly touched Yan Shi Ning’s chest.

Feng Su pulled out a handkerchief and was about to wipe wine off Yan Shi Ning’s lips but Pei Jin stood and pushed Feng Su away from Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and he smiled at the shocked Feng Su and Yu Lu.

‘You’re both not needed here,’ Pei Jin said. ‘You can both leave and remember to close the door.’

Feng Su and Yu Lu immediately left the room.

Outside the room Yu Lu spoke softly with Feng Su. ‘What did we do wrong?’

‘Nothing, we served them well,’ Feng Su said. ‘The master I was serving liked me.’

‘But the master I was serving didn’t like me,’ Yu Lu said. ‘He didn’t even glance at me once. He only looked at the master you were serving.’

‘Perhaps... they are a pair of lovers,’ Feng Su said. ‘Or the master you were serving loves the master I was serving.’

‘I think that’s possible,’ Yu Lu said.

‘Do you think the master I was serving loves the master you were serving?’ Feng Su asked.

‘I’m not certain,’ Yu Lu said. ‘Even if there’s no love, love could grow later. The master I was serving asked us to close the door. I think he can’t control himself anymore.’

Feng Su nodded his head. ‘The Tan Hua Tu fragrance is an aphrodisiac. But if he’s too forceful it’ll hurt.’

‘It has no relation to us,’ Yu Lu said. ‘That’s between the guests. We need to report to Gentleman Chen. I’ve served many guests, but this is the first time I was asked to leave.’

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End of Chapter Twenty-Six

***Related***

# Twenty-Seven



When the nest is overturned, no egg stays unbroken – in a disaster no one can escape the consequences (A New Account of the Tales of the World).

It's not a disaster if egg white mixes with egg yolk unless making a meringue.

HBAG – Chapter Twenty-Seven has mature content. Reader needs to be a matured egg to read chapter twenty-seven.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

‘Wife, do you love leering at beauties?’ Pei Jin asked and moved closer to Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning smiled and moved back on the bed.

‘Wife, do you want someone to serve you?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning over his lap and hit her bottom hard three times.

‘Wife, this is for leering at other men, touching another man’s hand and letting another man be near you,’ Pei Jin said.

‘You MF, you dare hit me!’ Yan Shi Ning cursed.

Pei Jin hit Yan Shi Ning’s bottom three more times.

‘I dare hit you,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Who forced you to perve at other men? Touch another man’s hand? Be near another man?’

Tears of anger and pain fell down Yan Shi Ning’s face. ‘You’re a wild animal!’

‘Wild animal?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘Wife, if you say you’re husband is a wild animal then I don’t want you to be wrong.’

Yan Shi Ning knew she was in trouble but it was too late to escape.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning upright. They were face to face and her legs straddled his thighs. He leaned forward, the bed was low and she wrapped her legs around his waist to stop herself from falling. He stripped her disguise until only the white fabric that bound her breasts was left.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's hardness pressed against her bottom and her hands quickly protected the white fabric. 'You... what do you want to do... ah!'

One of Pei Jin's hand held Yan Shi Ning's hands behind her back, his other hand unbound the white fabric and exposed her breasts.

'Ah!' Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Pei Jin bit Yan Shi Ning's left breast.

'You... be gentle!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin bit Yan Shi Ning's right breast and kissed her lips. She struggled to free her hands while her soft bottom was grinding his hardness.

'Wife, stop moving or I'll eat you here,' Pei Jin threatened.

Yan Shi Ning immediately stopped moving.

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning's pitiful face and he didn't want to scare her anymore. But he didn't want to let her go too easily.

'Wife, do you want someone to serve you?' Pei Jin asked. 'Your husband will serve you well.'

Pei Jin picked up the cup of wine from the table, drank the wine, opened Yan Shi Ning's mouth and his mouth transferred the wine into her mouth.

Yan Shi Ning choked a little and wine flowed out of her mouth. Pei Jin licked the wine off her face and kissed her. He savored her taste combined with the fragrant wine.

Yan Shi Ning felt like her body was gradually burning. Suddenly she felt thirsty and licked the sweet wine off Pei Jin's tongue.

Pei Jin was startled, it was the first time Yan Shi Ning didn't avoid his kiss. His hands quickly held her face and he deepened the kiss.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know when her hairpin fell but her black hair fell past her bare shoulders. Her face was as red as the bite marks on her breasts. She felt like a fire was burning her whole body and she felt even thirstier so she moved her bottom to reach for the wine jar.

Pei Jin gripped Yan Shi Ning's waist to stop her bottom from grinding his hardness.

Yan Shi Ning couldn't reach the wine jar but Pei Jin's mouth was within reach.

The longer Yan Shi Ning's tongue licked Pei Jin's tongue, the more he felt his self-control lessen. His hands left Yan Shi Ning's waist and lingered on her soft bottom. He didn't want to eat her at Fu Qing and was about to pick up the tea pot to help sober them but she grabbed the wine jar.

Yan Shi Ning tilted her head back and poured all the wine into her mouth.

Pei Jin watched the wine flowed out of Yan Shi Ning's mouth and flowed down her chin, neck, breasts... he couldn't watch idly anymore and licked the wine off her breasts.

Yan Shi Ning's body tingled after Pei Jin's tongue licked her breasts. She moaned and raised her chest closer to his mouth.

'Pei Jin, my body feels hot,' Yan Shi Ning said and rubbed her bottom against Pei Jin's hardness.

Pei Jin didn't know why Yan Shi Ning's body felt hotter than last night. But he saw the need in her eyes and kissed her lips.

'Shi Ning, wait,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin's hand touched Yan Shi Ning's sweetness between her legs. The moment his fingers entered her, she closed her eyes and moaned.

After Pei Jin heard Yan Shi Ning's moan, his fingers stroked harder inside her until her body tensed and fell limp on his chest.

'Wife, it's your turn to pleasure me,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin pulled off his pants, raised Yan Shi Ning's waist and his hardness entered her wet sweetness.



‘Ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out.

Pei Jin savored the sensation of Yan Shi Ning’s inner muscles that was tightening around his hardness. Then he bit hard on her earlobe.

‘Wife, bear the pain,’ Pei Jin whispered in Yan Shi Ning’s ear. ‘We’ll receive a pleasurable reward soon.’

Yan Shi Ning bit her lower lip. She felt Pei Jin’s hardness thrust deeper inside her. Her legs wrapped tighter around his waist and her hands held onto his shoulders.

Pei Jin’s hardness moved in and out of Yan Shi Ning’s sweetness while he sucked her nipples.

A while later Yan Shi Ning’s fingernails dug into Pei Jin’s shoulders, her whole body trembled and she moaned loudly.

Pei Jin’s hardness thrust into the deepest part of Yan Shi Ning’s sweetness and his hardness released semen.

Afterward Yan Shi Ning fainted on Pei Jin’s chest.

Pei Jin’s hardness withdrew from Yan Shi Ning’s body. He picked up the white fabric, wiped his semen off her inner thighs and his hardness. Then he dressed her and himself but she still didn’t wake up. He looked at her beautiful flushed face and couldn’t resist kissing her lips.

After Yan Shin Ning awoken she saw Pei Jin was starting at her chest.

‘Pei Jin, what wicked thoughts are you thinking?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning’s naive face as though she didn’t remember what happened between them earlier. He wondered if she was actually drunk while he ate her. In his memories she loved wine. He remembered she used to steal sips of wine from his teacher in Xuan Qing. But that night she drank a whole wine jar, it would be strange if she wasn’t drunk.

Pei Jin glanced at the untouched food on the table and he gently patted Yan Shi Ning’s cheek. ‘Wife, don’t sleep yet. Wait until we’re home.’

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head that felt light. She struggled to stand so she held Pei Jin’s arm.

‘Let’s go home together,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning’s warm words entered Pei Jin’s heart and his eyes stung happily.

Pei Jin wrapped an arm around Yan Shi Ning’s waist and he helped her walk toward the door.

Suddenly Pei Jin wondered why earlier Yan Shi Ning’s body was strangely hot. Was she drunk or did she desire him? Also, why couldn’t he control himself?

Pei Jin turned his head around and his eyes swept the room and stopped at the table. Was there medicine in the food? Fu Qing was famous for their food and wouldn’t risk their reputation. Then he stared at the fragrant pouch... after he returned to the manor he would send his guards to secretly investigate Fu Qing.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Seven

***Related***

# Twenty-Eight



Flowers should be seen in half bloom, wine should be drunk moderately – this is the most enjoyable stage. Flowers in full bloom, and men dead drunk become unpleasant scenes (Hong Zicheng).

## **Chapter Twenty-Eight**

Pei Jin braced Yan Shi Ning's shoulders outside the room.

Fu Qing's other guests were curious about the identities of the handsome Pei Jin and the drunk Yan Shi Ning. But it was an unspoken agreement that each of Fu Qing's guests would be blind to other guests' behaviour to protect their own identities.

In that moment Yan Shi Ning's head spun, her legs were wobbly and she felt pain between her thighs. She didn't remember everything that happened but she didn't doubt it was the MF Pei Jin's fault. She was about to curse him but her eyes saw someone familiar in front of them and her mouth gaped open.

Pei Jin's eyes followed Yan Shi Ning's gaze. There was nothing unusual to see a young handsome beauty in front of them. It was the familiar young man next to the beauty that was a surprise – the crown prince.

Pei Lam was shocked to see Pei Jin in a place unsuitable for a gentleman. But he felt like he was possessed by a demon, he was curious to see what kind of

man Pei Jin desired. He looked at the drunk man Pei Jin was supporting and his heart jumped... it was Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin was startled to see the crown prince was smiling inappropriately at Yan Shi Ning then he pulled her into his chest and shielded her from the crown prince's view. Inwardly he sighed, she lost her gentle lady image in front of the crown prince.

'Is ninth sister drunk?' Pei Lam asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head.

'I have a horse carriage waiting outside,' Pei Lam offered.

'Xiao Tu is waiting outside for my wife and me,' Pei Jin declined.

A silence followed after Pei Jin and Pei Lam's polite exchange.

'Crown prince, you're a beauty,' Yan Shi Ning said in her drunk state.

Pei Jin thought Yan Shi Ning became more daring by the day while her gentle lady image was gradually thinning. She even dared to tease the crown prince. He felt it was an injustice that she praised other men's looks but didn't praise his looks.

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning's waist to warn her to stop speaking nonsense.

'MF, why do you love pinching me?' Yan Shi Ning asked and pinched Pei Jin's hand.

Pei Jin choked helplessly. He was helping Yan Shi Ning protect her lady image but she was ungrateful.

Pei Lam looked enviously at Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's loving exchange.

'Ninth brother and ninth sister's loving bond makes other people envious,' Pei Lam said.

'My wife is drunk,' Pei Jin said. 'Tenth brother forgive her drunken behaviour. I'll take her home first.'

Pei Lam nodded his head and he watched Pei Jin carry Yan Shi Ning downstairs.

'Master, do you want to continue playing?' a young man asked.

Pei Lam shook his head. 'I'm not in the mood to play anymore.'

The young man knew the crown prince had a good personality but the crown prince was a difficult master to serve. The crown prince was someone if given a new toy, they would play with it for a few times and throw it away. The past few days the crown prince was unhappy so he suggested the crown prince should visit Fu Qing for a new experience. The crown prince agreed but he didn't expect the crown prince wouldn't be in the mood to play the moment the crown prince arrived at Fu Qing.

Pei Lam didn't know what he was thinking. He could only say to others that he didn't like something but he couldn't voice what he truly wanted. Since he was a young boy, everything good was set in front of him, but his elders always made his life decisions for him.

Pei Lam wanted to be free of his cage and experience the outside world. But the furthest his cage extended was to a place like Fu Qing. It made him felt like he was living a hopeless life.

Day and night, Pei Lam felt like that sense of hopelessness was burning him. Each day Yan Shi Ting would ask a palace maid to deliver a love letter to him. He read the first few love letters then later he asked one of his servants to read them and write a reply in his stead.

That night in the palace Pei Lam laid in his bed and thought about Yan Shi Ning. He remembered her liveliness and the red bite marks on her neck, immediately his little brother hardened. His hand rubbed his little brother until semen was released.

Away from the palace the drunk Yan Shi Ning was sinking in a bath tub. Pei Jin pulled her body above the water, took off his clothes and bathed together with her so she wouldn't drown.

Inside the bath tub Yan Shi Ning sat on his lap while his hands rubbed her soft breasts.

In Yan Shi Ning's drunk state she could still feel Pei Jin's hardness was rubbing against her bottom and his hands were rubbing her breasts. She leaned her face close to his face and bit his lips.

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning's bottom. 'Wife, why did you bite me?'

'Pei Jin... umm... ah... you MF, you're always bullying me... umm...' Yan Shi Ning murmured while her body trembled.

Pei Jin carried Yan Shi Ning's wet limp body to the bed. He dried her body first then he dried his body. Afterward he laid next to her and stroked her back. 'Wife, inside your heart am I only someone who bullies you?'

Yan Shi Ning didn't answer. But the night air cooled and her body searched for the warmest spot on the bed. After the warmest spot was found, she moaned and slept peacefully.

Pei Jin didn't dare move. Yan Shi Ning's head was laying on his chest, her arms wrapped tightly around his waist and she draped a leg over his thighs. If he moved then he wouldn't want to stop moving.

Pei Jin pinched Yan Shi Ning's nose and scratched her waist. She scrunched her face but refused to wake up.

'Shi Ning,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes, saw Pei Jin and closed her eyes again.

'Shi Ning,' Pei Jin said.

'Huh?' Yan Shi Ning murmured.

Pei Jin rubbed the childish Yan Shi Ning's head and whispered in her ear. 'Shi Ning, the MF Pei Jin who bullies you, do you love him?'

Pei Jin knew Yan Shi Ning was an honest drunk and he anticipated her answer.

'I don't love him,' Yan Shi Ning said and rolled over.

Pei Jin hit Yan Shi Ning's bottom. 'Heartless little demon. I treat you well but you don't hesitate to say you don't love me.'

Yan Shi Ning rubbed her sore bottom in her sleep. 'MF, you dare hit me again.'

'Then is Pei Jin a handsome man?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning didn't open her mouth.

'Shi Ning?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning snored.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. But he felt like he was hugging a delicious meat and he couldn't sleep.

If Pei Jin moved a little lower then he could eat Yan Shi Ning. His heart wavered between eating and soothing her body pain.

A while later Pei Jin got out of bed and picked up the herbal remedy he bought for Yan Shi Ning. He remembered he roughly ate her at Fu Qing and thought she would feel pain between her thighs in the morning.

Pei Jin returned to the bed, spread Yan Shi Ning's legs and rubbed the herbal remedy inside her. He heard her moan and knew the herbal remedy was soothing her body but it also erected his desire.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Eight

***Related***



# Twenty-Nine



Fire looks threatening – so few get burned, water looks weak and soft, so many get drowned (Han Fei Tzu).

Twenty-nine looks like a harmless number. But HBAG – Chapter Twenty-Nine contains mature content.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

Yan Shi Ning stirred in her sleep. She dreamt fingers were stroking inside her and moaned.

‘Little lion, you have a responsive body,’ Pei Jin teased and his fingers stroked faster inside Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning’s hands clutched the blanket and she couldn’t stop moans from escaping her throat. Her body was close to the peak but suddenly the fingers stopped and her body was trapped between frustration and pleasure.

Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes and saw Pei Jin was smiling too brightly.

Pei Jin swept Yan Shi Ning’s sweaty hair away from her mouth. He kissed her lips and his fingers slowly stroke inside her. She bit her lips and anticipated the strange pleasurable sensation.

‘Do you want to?’ Pei Jin asked and withdrew his fingers.

‘Umm...’ Yan Shi Ning murmured.

Pei Jin parted Yan Shi Ning’s legs wider and his hardness swiftly entered her.

‘Ah, ah!’ Yan Shi Ning cried out and gripped the blanket tighter.

Pei Jin’s hardness grind deep inside Yan Shi Ning’s most sensitive spot and felt her body tremble. His hands lifted her bottom and his hardness moved swiftly in and out of her body.

The bed rocked, the beaded curtains shook and the spring scent filled the chamber.

The loud grunts and the joining of naked flesh would make even a moon deity blush.

Yan Shi Ning's body peaked many times under Pei Jin's body. The louder she moaned the swifter his hardness moved in and out of her body.

Yan Shi Ning cried tears of pleasure and her hands gripped Pei Jin's arms.

'Be gentle... it hurts!' Yan Shi Ning pleaded.

Pei Jin's hardness stilled inside Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Shi Ning, say my name.'

'Pei Jin, Pei Jin, Pei Jin!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning spoke louder each time she said Pei Jin's name, because his hardness would withdraw and thrust harder inside her body each time she said his name.

'Pei Jin! Be gentle... ah!' Yan Shi Ning pleaded.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning's body peaked again yet he hadn't peaked once that night. He kissed her lips and coaxed her. 'Shi Ning, be good. Bear the pain a little longer. If you stop me now then I'll eat you until the morning.'

Pei Jin lifted Yan Shi Ning's bottom higher and his hardness moved faster and deeper inside her body.

'Ah... ah... Pei Jin, how much longer?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Soon, Shi Ning wrapped your legs around my waist,' Pei Jin said.

'Ah... ah...' Yan Shi Ning cried out.

'Don't move... umm... stay in that spot,' Pei Jin said.

'Ah... ah... you're bullying me again,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Be good,' Pei Jin said. 'In the future I won't bully you again.'

'Liar!' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Shi Ning, this time we'll feel pleasure together,' Pei Jin said.

No gaps were visible between Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's joined bodies. She felt

his semen flooded inside the deepest part of her body. She arched her body, felt that strange pleasurable sensation again, cried out loudly and fainted.

After Pei Jin's body peaked, his body relaxed and he felt refreshed. He picked up the fallen blanket, hugged Yan Shi Ning and covered their bodies with the blanket. That night they both slept peacefully.

The following morning Yan Shi Ning woke up in pain. She didn't have energy to even move a finger. She wondered what happened last night.

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin's naked body that was hugging her naked body and knew what happened last night. He ate her last night! She shook her head and frowned... how did he get to eat her?

Yan Shi Ning remembered clearly at Fu Qing the MF Pei Jin hit her bottom. Afterward he pulled off her clothes and kissed her. Then she felt her body was hot and she willingly kissed and licked Pei Jin... but when did they return to the manor?

Yan Shi Ning blushed at the memories that flowed through her head. She couldn't believe she kissed and licked the MF Pei Jin... she didn't doubt he was going to mock her to death!

Yan Shi Ning felt she was an insane drunkard and lost her dignity.

Pei Jin woke up and saw Yan Shi Ning was pouting her lips. 'Wife, what are you thinking about?'

'It hurts!' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Where does it hurt?' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin stood up naked in front of Yan Shi Ning and she pulled the blanket over her face.

'It hurts everywhere!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin wore his clothes, walked outside and asked a maid to prepare a basin of water. Then he returned to the bed and massaged Yan Shi Ning's body.

'Who forced you to drink too much last night?' Pei Jin asked.

'Last night what did I do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Wife... last night you did too many things,’ Pei Jin teased.

‘Like what?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘You praised the crown prince’s looks,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning took deep breaths... she lost her gentle lady image.

‘Why didn’t you stop me?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin sighed helplessly. ‘Wife, don’t you remember? I did try to stop you but you were drunk.’

Yan Shi Ning listened to Pei Jin recounted what else happened and she wanted to mourn her lost gentle lady image.

‘I knew your real personality before you married me,’ Pei Jin said. ‘So if you lost your gentle lady image, it’s alright. You don’t need to act gentle anymore.’

Yan Shi Ning was too angry to speak. She knew if she lived together with Pei Jin there would be a day her real personality would be exposed.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning was angry from her head to her feet, it made him wanted to tease her more. ‘Also... it’s a pity you don’t remember. Last night, you were excessively aggressive and your gentle husband couldn’t cope.’

Pei Jin smiled at Yan Shi Ning and licked his lips.

Yan Shi Ning remembered how she kissed and licked Pei Jin. She rolled over and hid her embarrassed face on the pillow.

‘Wife, you don’t need to be embarrassed,’ Pei Jin said. ‘We’re married. But it appears your expectations are too high. In the future your husband will need to exert more energy. Why don’t we do it again now?’

Pei Jin’s hands stroked Yan Shi Ning’s back.

Yan Shi Ning raised her head, glared at Pei Jin and hid her embarrassed face on the pillow again.

A while later Yan Shi Ning got out of bed and bathed. Afterward her head still hurt and she wanted to go back to sleep. But she saw a maid carried out the stained blanket and she didn’t have anywhere to hide on the bed.

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning onto the bed and rubbed the herbal remedy

between her thighs. Then they ate a morning meal together. After the meal, she slept while Pei Jin visited Bei Dou's chamber.

Pei Jin recounted what happened at Fu Qing to Bei Dou.

'Do you think it's strange that even the crown prince was there?' Pei Jin asked.

'No, I think it's strange your wife was there,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin was speechless.

'You dote on your wife too much,' Bei Dou said.

'Of course,' Pei Jin said.

'That's not good,' Bei Dou warned.

'I think we should talk about something else that's stranger,' Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou was skeptically silent.

'I know my boundaries,' Pei Jin said.

'Destruction under a beauty,' Bei Dou said.

'Elder Ma says that too,' Pei Jin said.

'Why did the crown prince go there?' Bei Dou asked.

'Perhaps he was too free and wanted new amusement,' Pei Jin said. 'When I saw him, he was calm like usual. I don't think he's involved.'

'Then why did you go there?' Bei Dou asked and gave Pei Jin a don't-you-know-you're-a-prince-too look.

'That's what's strange,' Pei Jin said. 'You know I'm a cautious person. I wouldn't go anywhere that's dangerous.'

'You suspect someone at Fu Qing?' Bei Dou said.

'In the past I ate in the middle terrace of Fu Qing and nothing strange happened,' Pei Jin said. 'I think it's someone from the right terrace.'

'Brothels usually use aphrodisiac fragrances,' Bei Dou said.

'Aphrodisiac fragrances are used in the middle terrace too,' Pei Jin said. 'I've breathed it in before and it didn't affect me. I suspected it's the wine but Fu Qing

is a reputable place for food and wine so they wouldn't tamper with the wine.'

'Then what do you want?' Bei Dou asked suspiciously.

'I need to inconvenient Gentleman Bei to personally go there and investigate,' Pei Jin requested.

'No!' Bei Dou refused and blushed.

'You're a healthy twenty-two year old man but you're no different from a monk,' Pei Jin provoked.

Bei Dou straightened his sleeves and left his chamber.

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End of Chapter Twenty-Nine

***Related***

# Thirty



## Chapter Thirty

Bei Dou paced back and forth in front of Fu Qing's three entrances.

Bei Dou didn't know if he should walk through the left or right entrance. He took a deep breath and walked through the right entrance.

Bei Dou thought men wouldn't want to serve someone like him. The moment he was inside he realised his thoughts were too naive.

Someone named Man Feng served Bei Dou. Bei Dou thought he was in the wrong place because Man Feng looked and walked in a feminine way.

'Are you a man?' Bei Dou asked.

'You're hateful,' Man Feng said flirtatiously. 'If I'm not a man, do you think I'm a woman?'

Man Feng knelt in front of Bei Dou who sat on a bed.

Man Feng usually served regular customers but he made an exception for Bei Dou. He loved serving men like Bei Dou who looked cold on the outside but was naive on the inside.

'Master, I'll pour wine for you,' Man Feng said.

Bei Dou was repulsed by the strong fragrance on Man Feng's body, he moved back on the bed.

Man Feng raised the cup of wine to Bei Dou's mouth. 'Master, I'll feed you.'

Goose bumps rose on Bei Dou's skin and he grabbed the cup of wine from Man Feng.

'I have hands,' Bei Dou said.

Bei Dou drank the wine and frowned. After he walked into the room he could smell the pouch fragrance but it wasn't harmful. But combined with the wine it was a strong aphrodisiac. Also, the fragrance and wine brewer needed to be highly skilled to make such a strong aphrodisiac.

Bei Dou thought the brewer's skills were impressive. He wondered if the purpose was to stimulate their guests or to extract secrets from their vulnerable guests.

Since the brewer wasted a lot of energy to make a strong aphrodisiac then Bei Dou wasn't going to disappoint the brewer. But he wasn't affected by the strong aphrodisiac and thought for a while how to act drunk.

'Ah... my head hurts,' Bei Dou said and slowly swayed his head side to side.

Man Feng laughed softly. 'Master, of course your head hurts. You drank too fast. Don't you know how to drink slowly? Or is it master has many grievances? You can tell me your grievances, it'll improve your mood.'

Bei Dou felt repulsed being touched by another person. But he needed to act drunk so his body didn't recoil from Man Feng's hand on his chest. He decided he was going to wash his body thoroughly after he returned to the manor.

'Master, what's upsetting you?' Man Feng asked.

'My master forced me to do something I didn't want to do,' Bei Dou said.

'Who is your hateful master?' Man Feng asked.

Bei Dou continued to sway his head.

'Master, who is your hateful master that forced you to do something you don't want to?' Man Feng asked.



Bei Dou thought Man Feng was a beautiful man and had a persuasive voice. If it was someone else, Man Feng would have extracted all their secrets from birth. But he wasn't someone else. The strong aphrodisiac and Man Feng's beauty didn't affect him. He knew if he wanted to find out why Fu Qing wanted to extract secrets from their guests, he needed to use a little honesty to fool Man Feng.

'My master is gentle ninth prince,' Bei Dou said. 'He forced me to... to...'

Man Feng's eyes brightened after he heard gentle ninth prince. 'What did gentle ninth prince force you to do?'

'He forced me to... too... I can't say...' Bei Dou said.

Ma Feng heard 'I can't say' and wanted to vomit blood.

Bei Dou slowly stood and swayed his body. 'It's late. I need to return to the manor otherwise gentle ninth prince will be suspicious.'

Man Feng watched Bei Dou staggered outside. He regretted he couldn't extract secrets from a golden duck like Bei Dou.

After Bei Dou left Fu Qing, Man Feng searched for Gentleman Chen.

Ma Feng found Gentleman Chen outside a guest and a woman server's room.

'Gentle ninth prince sent one of his servants here?' Gentleman Chen asked.

'Yes,' Ma Feng said.

'Gentle ninth prince protects his manor like a steel cage,' Gentleman Chen said. 'He doesn't easily give secrets away. I didn't expect him to send someone through our door. It's our good fortune. Did you send someone to follow his servant?'

'Yes,' Ma Feng said.

'Good,' Gentleman Chen praised. 'Take good care of this fish for me. I want to see what he plans to do.'

After Bei Dou lost the man Fu Qing sent to follow him, he rushed to his chamber, took three warm baths to rid of the strong fragrance on his body and slept on his bed.

Early the following morning Bei Dou was woken up by loud knocks on the door.

Bei Dou got out of bed, opened the door and saw Pei Jin's spring smile then he wanted to close the door.

'Wait,' Pei Jin said. He entered Bei Dou's chamber, closed the door and teased Bei Dou with two cooked eggs. 'This is for you to nourish your body.'

Bei Dou heard 'nourish your body' and understood Pei Jin was mocking him.

'I heard last night you came home in the middle of night,' Pei Jin said and winked at Bei Dou. 'Where else did you go?'

Bei Dou refused to answer. He knew Pei Jin knew he was followed.

'You don't need to hide where you went,' Pei Jin said. 'You don't need to look at me in that way. We're both men, I understand. In the future if you want to go there then go. You don't need to hide it from me. Even if you come back in the middle of the night, you don't need to climb over the wall. You can walk through the front door and no one will dare to tease you.'

Bei Dou broke the bowl of cooked eggs.

'Pei Jin, do you want to know what I discovered at Fu Qing?' Bei Dou asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head. 'But first tell me where you went. Which of Fu Qing's entrances did you walk through? The right or left entrance? I made a bet with little lion. She said you're a gentleman and would walk through the left entrance. I said that because you're a gentleman you would walk through the right entrance. Were you a gentleman or not?'

Bei Dou broke the table. He didn't expect a married pair like Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were compatible to that extent and enjoyed mocking him.

'Bei Dou, I was jesting,' Pei Jin said. 'You don't need to be too serious.'

Bei Dou calmed himself then he recounted what happened at Fu Qing, but he didn't expect Pei Jin would be surprised.

'Does that mean you didn't do anything last night?' Pei Jin asked. 'You're still a pure man?'

Bei Dou heard 'pure man' and decided he would find a way to make Pei Jin

suffer a little.

Pei Jin rubbed his chin. 'It appears the brothels in Fu Qing aren't simply brothels. I need to investigate who are involved in this scheme.' He sighed. 'Recently there's been many situations I need to investigate.'

Pei Jin returned to his chamber. Before any investigations were resolved, a messenger delivered an invitation. On the sixth day of the tenth month was the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting's wedding banquet.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning looked at each other in surprise. The empress had intentions for the crown prince to marry Yan Shi Ting early the following year. They didn't know what happened for the sudden change in the wedding day... unless Yan Shi Ting's body suddenly changed.

In the palace the maids and eunuchs quickly left the emperor's chamber.

The emperor's veins were visible on his face and neck while the empress and the crown prince knelt on the floor.

'Good!' the emperor praised. 'You dare to do this! I underestimated you! Do you want me to lose all my dignity? You're not married but you dare to get a lady pregnant!'

'Emperor don't be angry,' the empress said. 'It's not unusual for a young man struggling to control their desires.'

'Are all his maids dead?' the emperor asked. 'Why didn't I see him losing his control with them? Hong Thi, don't think I don't know your motives. You don't suit being the kingdom's empress. What kind of mother would encourage this to happen?'

The empress' face paled. 'Emperor, I-'

'Close your mouth!' the emperor ordered and glared at the crown prince. 'Why did I give birth to such a despicable son like you?'

'Imperial father, I deserve to die,' Pei Lam said.

The emperor knocked over a vase but it wasn't enough to vent his anger.

'While the stomach's not showing,' the emperor said. 'Hurry and deal with the situation!'

The empress sighed in relief. She knew the emperor was angry but he would eventually relent.

In contrast Pei Lam smiled coldly. He knew there would be some things he couldn't escape from.

The emperor didn't want to see the empress and the crown prince any longer and dismissed them from his chamber.

After the emperor was alone in his chamber, he sighed and felt like some things were outside the control of his hand.

At the Yan Manor, Yan Shi Ting was rubbing her stomach anxiously.

'Mother, this is too risky,' Yan Shi Ting said. 'Deceiving the emperor like this is a death penalty crime!'

Princess Kang Hua drank tea and spoke calmly. 'You only need to know you don't have one now but in the future you can have one.'

'What if I'm not pregnant after I marry big brother crown prince?' Yan Shi Ting asked.

Yan Shi Ting was intimate with the crown prince many times. But each time he asked her to drink the herbal remedy to prevent pregnancy.

Princess Kang Hua put the cup of tea down. 'Your aunt said that if you can't get pregnant then you can use another infant as a temporary substitute.'

'What?' Yan Shi Ting asked. 'You want me to raise someone else's child?'

Princess Kang Hua laughed coldly. 'Of course not. No one else's child would have a chance to become emperor. The infant is only a pawn. After you give birth to your own child, the pawn will disappear.'

Yan Shi Ting was frightened to hear her mother's heartless tone. She felt uneasy about killing an innocent child.

'Don't ever forget,' Princess Kang Hua said. 'If you want to be empress, you need to be willing to do anything and sacrifice anything.'

Yan Shi Ting hesitated for a while but nodded her head to appease her mother.

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End of Chapter Thirty

***Related***

# Thirty-One



## Chapter Thirty-One

Pei Jin read a letter from Elder Ma in the calligraphy room.

Elder Ma's messenger also sent Pei Jin dried fishes. In the letter Elder Ma wrote the dried fishes were raised by Pei Jin in Southern Jiang and they tasted delicious.

Pei Jin hid the letter. He knew it was Elder Ma's code that Elder Ma received his letter about what happened in the palace.

Pei Jin thought whether it was a blessing or a curse to be born into an imperial family where the father was suspicious of sons and the sons fought each other. Was he supposed to be defensive and protect his own family or did he need to take revenge to survive?

Later that morning Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning visited the palace for a family gathering.

Yan Shi Ning's body wasn't as sore as last night and she wore a light dress and it helped her walk easier.

Consort Mu was taking care of the injured seventh prince. So apart from Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning, only the emperor, the empress, the crown prince, Consort La

and Pei Khan were at the family gathering.

Pei Khan wanted to run to Pei Jin but he was scared the emperor would scold him and stood next to Consort La.

‘If you want to go there then go,’ the emperor said to Pei Khan. ‘You don’t need to stand there and wrinkle a small face.’

Pei Khan didn’t understand what the emperor meant until Consort La explained to him then he ran to Pei Jin.

The empress watched Pei Jin carry Pei Khan in his arms and she smiled politely. ‘Indeed ninth prince and thirteenth prince are loving brothers.’

‘Are they not allowed to be?’ the emperor asked.

The empress closed her mouth and didn’t dare to criticize Pei Jin and Pei Khan anymore.

Consort La saw the tension between the emperor and empress and she wanted to ease their tension.

‘Yesterday I received the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting’s wedding invitation,’ Consort La said. ‘It’ll be a happy occasion.’

Pei Lam’s heart sank. He stared longingly at Yan Shi Ning but she was focused on playing with Pei Khan.

Pei Jin noticed the way the crown prince was staring at Yan Shi Ning and it confirmed his suspicions about the crown prince’s feelings toward Yan Shi Ning.

‘Consort La is right,’ Pei Jin said. ‘It’ll be a happy occasion. Congratulations tenth brother.’

Pei Lam knew the warning look in Pei Jin’s eyes didn’t match Pei Jin’s happy tone. He nodded his head and politely thanked Pei Jin.

The empress only regretted the crown prince didn’t marry Yan Shi Ting earlier. After seventh prince saved the emperor, some of the crown prince’s supporters became restless. The sooner the crown prince married Prime Minister Yan’s youngest daughter the sooner she would be at ease that the emperor wouldn’t give the crown prince’s position to seventh prince.

The emperor drank tea slowly. In the past he didn't care the empress wanted the crown prince to marry Prime Minister Yan's youngest daughter who had a status that matched the crown prince. But after the assassination attempt, he didn't approve of Yan Shi Ting marrying the crown prince. That day Yan Shi Ting's first reaction was to hide behind the crown prince then Yan Shi Ting pulled her older sister in front of her to save herself. A woman who was scared of death wasn't suited to be the crown prince's wife.

The tension between the emperor and empress increased and it made everyone else around them uneasy too.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning exchanged a look, understood what each other's thoughts and they continued to play with Pei Khan.

Consort La broke the tensed silence. 'Their wedding day is an auspicious day.'

The emperor hid his frown behind the cup of tea. In the past he only thought Consort La was naive and kind but recently he thought her intelligence lessened by the day. He glanced at Pei Khan who only knew how to eat and play, sighed and put the cup down.

The empress' back stiffened. She lived with the emperor for many year and knew when he was in a bad mood. Regardless of the emperor's disapproval, she would ensure the crown prince married Yan Shi Ting on the sixth day of the ninth month.

Pei Lam drank tea and thought the tea tasted more bitter than usual.

After the family gathering ended the emperor, the crown prince and Pei Jin discussed imperial court matters while Consort La invited Yan Shi Ning to her chamber.

Yan Shi Ning did hesitate to accept Consort La's invitation because she knew Pei Jin didn't want her to be close to anyone else in the imperial family. But Pei Jin nodded his head to signal she could spend time with Pei Khan and Consort La.

The flowers were in full bloom along the garden path toward Consort La's chamber.

Pei Khan's feet were tired from walking too long. The nurse maid was about to pick him up but he pulled the sleeve of Yan Shi Ning's dress.



‘Carry, carry,’ Pei Khan said.

‘Xiao Khan, don’t trouble your ninth sister,’ Consort La said.

‘Mother, it’s alright,’ Yan Shi Ning said and carried Pei Khan in her arms.

Pei Khan wrapped an arm around Yan Shi Ning’s neck and held a sweet bun with his free hand. He happily ate and wiped the crumbs stuck on his fingers onto Yan Shi Ning’s neck.

Yan Shi Ning felt something sticky on her neck and realised it was Pei Khan’s saliva and sweet bun crumbs. She glanced at Consort La who wasn’t looking at them so she lightly hit Pei Khan’s bottom.

Inside Consort La’s chamber, Pei Khan sat on Yan Shi Ning’s lap opposite Consort La.

‘Shi Ning, thank you for saving Pei Khan’s life,’ Consort La said sincerely.

‘Mother, you don’t need to be courteous,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Thirteenth prince is a good child.’

‘Xiao Ning, you’re a good person,’ Consort La praised.

A maid entered the chamber and passed a small chest to Consort La.

Consort La opened the chest, picked up the butterfly hairpin decorated with gems and gave it to Yan Shi Ning.

‘This hairpin is for you,’ Consort La said.

‘Mother, this is too valuable for me to accept,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Take it,’ Consort La said. ‘This is only a hairpin. Xiao Khan’s safety means more to me.’

Yan Shi Ning heard the sadness in Consort La’s tone.

‘I’m only six years older than you but my body can’t cope much longer,’ Consort La said.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘The makeup hides my body condition,’ Consort La said. ‘I was born with a weak body and after giving birth to Xiao Khan, my body became weaker. My

family has no status and I have no friends in the palace. I'm worried about what's going to happen to Xiao Khan after I...'

Yan Shi Ning didn't know Consort La well. But she thought Consort La was a sincere person. Unlike other people, Consort La never arranged coincidental meetings with her or Pei Jin. Consort La only cared about Pei Khan's safety and didn't desire power.

'Shi Ning, forgive me for being bold,' Consort La said. 'I'm asking you as a mother... if something happens to me, I hope that you and ninth prince will protect Xiao Khan.'

Yan Shi Ning saw the desperation in Consort La's eyes. Consort La's sudden request shocked her and she didn't know how to react.

A while later Yan Shi Ning opened her mouth. 'Mother, don't talk about something bad. You need to take good care of yours and Pei Khan's health. No one can predict the future.'

Consort La was a little disappointed. She understood Yan Shi Ning didn't want to accept her request.

'You're right,' Consort La said. 'No one can predict the future. Forgive my boldness earlier.'

'Mother, it's nothing,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Afterward Consort La and Yan Shi Ning talked about less heavy matters and they played with Pei Khan until Pei Jin escorted Yan Shi Ning to the horse carriage.

Consort La watched Yan Shi Ning leave then she looked sadly at the butterfly hairpin Yan Shi Ning left on the table.

In the evening Yan Shi Ning laid next to Pei Jin on their bed and recounted her conversation with Consort La.

'You did well,' Pei Jin praised.

'In the future if something happens to Consort La, should we take care of Pei Khan or not?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Wife, do you want to take care of Pei Khan or not?' Pei Jin asked.

‘Pei Khan is pitiful,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Then we’ll take care of Pei Khan,’ Pei Jin said and took off Yan Shi Ning’s clothes.

‘Pei Khan has a loveable face,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If I was younger I would tease him... ah... that hurts... don’t need to!’

Pei Jin bit Yan Shi Ning’s breast. ‘Of course we need to conceive a child together soon. How else can you have a child you can tease comfortably?’

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End of Chapter Thirty-One

***Related***

# Thirty-Two



## Chapter Thirty-Two

Widow Li carried a bowl of food and a bowl of medicine from the kitchen to a small chamber.

‘Older cousin, eat your meal,’ widow Li said.

‘Why are you feeding rubbish for someone ill to eat?’ old Li asked and knocked over the bowl of food.

Widow Li cried while she was kneeling and picking up the fallen food and broken bowl.

‘The cost of your medicine rose,’ widow Li said. ‘There is only a few silver taels left.’

‘Don’t you know how to demand more silver taels?’ old Li asked.

‘Princess Kang Hua said she’s not going to give me anymore silver taels,’ widow Li said.

Old Li threw a cup at widow Li's head. 'You have a hold of Princess Kang Hua's tail but you're scared of her. If you're this dumb then die.'

Widow Li's head hurt and more tears flowed down her face.

'You only know how to cry!' old Li said. 'You won't be satisfied until I die. In the past it was a waste to take care of you.'

'It's not like that,' widow Li said.

'If it's not like that then hurry and go to the Yan Manor and demand more silver taels!' old Li said. 'You can threaten Princess Kang Hua that you'll tell Prime Minister Yan and ninth prince's wife if Princess Kang Hua doesn't give you the silver taels. If I wasn't bedridden I'll go there myself. Go! Buy proper food on the way back... useless woman!'

Widow Li tidied the small chamber, changed into dry clothes and walked toward the Yan Manor.

Xiao Zai who Pei Jin asked to follow widow Li was hiding on the roof. Pei Jin instructed if he didn't find out about widow Li's situation then he wasn't allowed to return to the manor. But he didn't expect to find out Princess Kang Hua was had a secret she didn't want Yan Shi Ning to know. He was anticipating Pei Jin's praises and finally the other guards couldn't mock him anymore for his poor fighting skills.

Xiao Zai spat on old Li's head through a roof hole.

'Coward old man!' Xiao Zai cursed softly and rushed back to the manor.

On the way to the Yan Manor, widow Li was burdened with guilt and anxiety. She didn't like going to the Yan Manor to ask Princess Kang Hua for silver taels. She wished she never betrayed her conscience and never confided her secret to her older cousin.

Widow Li remembered her life with her older cousin far south from the imperial city. Although they worked hard to survive, he didn't verbally or physically abuse her. She thought perhaps it was her retribution. Every year on the anniversary of big sister Dung Thi's death, she would have nightmares and mumble in her sleep. Her cousin asked her why she had nightmares, she confessed what she did and everything changed for the worse.

Widow Li's older cousin dragged her to the imperial city, called her a dumb woman for being easily chased away by one thousand taels and intimidated her to go to the Yan Manor. She listened and asked for money for the first time in her life. Princess Kang Hua gave her another two thousand silver taels. Her older cousin spent all the two thousand silver taels on gambling and women at brothels.

The second time widow Li's older cousin told her to go ask for silver taels, Princess Kang Hua gave her another one thousand silver taels. But her older cousin also received retribution, he fell off a horse and his legs were crippled. She spent the one thousand silver taels to buy his medicine.

So that day it was the third time widow Li was forced to ask for money, she was truly scared what Princess Kang Hua would do to her. She vowed it was going to be the last time she asked for money and her older cousin's health would be left up to his fate.

Half a shichen hour later widow Li left the Yan Manor with a paper note worth one thousand silver taels.

Inside the Yan Manor, Princess Kang Hua sat on a chair in her chamber and thought of a deadly plan to kill widow Li.

'Widow Li is more daring by the day,' old nurse maid said. 'She dared to threaten princess. Last time princess warned her it was the last time. Princess, you need to get rid of her.'

Princess Kang Hua hated throwing paper notes out the window, especially paper notes she saved for her elderly years.

'I know,' Princess Kang Hua. 'Go and send someone to eliminate her.'

Princess Kang Hua smiled coldly, soon there would be no one left to threaten her.

At Pei Jin's Manor, Xiao Zai reported widow Li's situation to Pei Jin.

'Are you certain you heard properly?' Pei Jin asked.

'Ninth prince, you know I'm not a good fighter but everything else about me is good,' Xiao Zai said. 'If I don't have good ears then you wouldn't have asked me

to eavesdrop.'

Pei Jin laughed. 'Then why didn't you follow her to the Yan Manor to eavesdrop?'

Xiao Zai looked pitifully at Pei Jin. 'Ninth prince, I did want to follow her to the Yan Manor but the wall there is too high for me to climb. In the future I'll learn how to climb high walls.'

'Nonsense, hurry and go follow her,' Pei Jin said. 'But this time be careful.'

Xiao Zai left Bei Dou's chamber and Pei Jin's complexion darkened.

'What secret do you think Princess Kang Hua is hiding from your wife?' Bei Dou asked.

Pei Jin took a deep breath. 'I fear the death of my wife's mother wasn't natural.'

Bei Dou was shocked speechless.

'Princess Kang Hua isn't someone who can easily be threatened,' Pei Jin said. 'To be safe I want you to send Xiao Hui to accompany Xiao Zai. Instruct Xiao Hui to protect widow Li and don't let widow Li be assassinated. Also, you can't tell my wife about this.'

Yan Shi Ning loved her mother, Pei Jin feared she would do something reckless if she found out.

That evening, west of Pei Jin's manor, widow Li got out of bed and walked to the toilet hole outside.

'Why is there only one person home?' Xiao Hui asked. 'Where's widow Li?'

Xiao Hui rolled old Li's body over. 'Ah! Did I kill someone?'

'Nonsense,' Xiao Hui said.

Xiao Hui suspected Princess Kang Hua sent an assassin to kill widow Li.

In that moment widow Li walked back toward her chamber but she saw two dark figures who were standing in front of her older cousin's bed. She didn't see her older cousin move and was about to scream but one of dark figures covered her mouth.

Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai carried widow Li to an abandoned shelter nearby.

‘We’re not bad people,’ Xiao Zai said. ‘Right now our master is sleeping with our mistress. It’s safe for you to sleep here tonight, tomorrow you can see our master.’

‘Who is your master?’ widow Li asked.

‘You don’t need to worry,’ Xiao Hui said. ‘What you need to know you’ll know. What you don’t need to know even if you ask no one will tell you.’

Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai walked outside the shelter. Xiao Hui locked the door while Xiao Zai cried and held Xiao Hui’s arm.

‘Someone died... scary...’ Xiao Zai muttered.

Xiao Hui pulled his arm free. ‘You can die too.’

At Pei Jin’s Manor, Yan Shi Ning was dreaming. She dreamt her mother was hugging her and singing her a song. Suddenly her mother’s body began to bleed and her mother held her hand, ‘Shi Ning, you need to live a good life. I only want you to be safe. Don’t become like me...’

‘Mother... don’t go!’ Yan Shi Ning mumbled in her sleep. ‘Don’t leave me by myself...’

‘Shi Ning, Shi Ning!’ Pei Jin called.

Yan Shi Ning was startled awake, she opened her eyes and cried loudly. ‘Pei Jin, my mother...’

‘Don’t cry,’ Pei Jin said. ‘You have me.’

Yan Shi Ning hugged Pei Jin tightly. ‘Why did you go to Southern Jiang and didn’t come back to visit me... I was by myself...’

In Xuan Qing Yan Shi Ning didn’t have any friends because of hers and her mother’s status. Although Pei Jin bullied her, she knew that he cared about her and someone who would protect her. But when she needed him the most he disappeared to Southern Jiang.

‘In the future I won’t leave you by yourself again,’ Pei Jin promised.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Two

***Related***

# Thirty-Three



## Chapter Thirty-Three

The following morning Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai returned to the manor.

Pei Jin was awoken by Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai's whistles outside the chamber.

Pei Jin got out of bed and reassured Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, I'm going out for an inspection. After I come back we'll go to the Yan Manor to visit your father.'

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning, dressed and entered the horse carriage.

Inside the horse carriage Xiao Zai was eating a bowl of noodles while Xiao Hui glared at Xiao Zai.

'Ninth prince, have you eaten a morning meal?' Xiao Zai asked. 'Do you want to taste the noodles Xiao Hui cooked? It's delicious.'

'Do you think I'll let you eat my bowl of noodles if you didn't spit in it?' Xiao Hui asked.

Pei Jin patted Xiao Hui's shoulder. 'Xiao Hui, next time Xiao Zai spits, you can

vomit and see if he'll dare to eat it.'

Xiao Zai smiled sweetly at Xiao Hui. 'Xiao Hui, I like your saliva.'

If Pei Jin wasn't a witness, Xiao Hui would have pushed Xiao Zai outside the horse carriage.

The horse carriage stopped in front of a locked shelter west of Pei Jin's manor.

Widow Li heard the door opened and turned her head to the door. Her eyes adjusted to the sunlight that shone into the dark room and she was shocked to see Pei Jin.

'Ninth prince,' widow Li said.

Pei Jin sat on the chair opposite widow Li and looked coldly at her. 'Widow Li, how did my wife's mother die?'

'Ninth prince, it was Princess Kang Hua's plan,' widow Li said in a shaky voice.

'Widow Li, you don't need to be anxious,' Pei Jin said. 'Slowly explain everything.'

'I was widowed before I was thirty years old,' widow Li said. 'Old nurse maid caught me in bed with her son-in-law and wanted to report me to the magistrate. I begged old nurse maid not to report me and promised her I would willingly be a work horse if she forgives my offence. Old nurse maid agreed on the condition I go to Xuan Qing and spy on big sister Dung Thi... old nurse maid setup coincidental meetings between me and big sister Dung Thi and that's how I became big sister Dung Thi and your wife's maid.'

Widow Li cried tears of guilt while she confessed. 'If Yan Jing sent letters to big sister Dung Thi, old nurse maid ordered me to intercept the letters and send them back to Yan Jing. For two years I listened to old nurse maid's orders because aside from sending back letters, I didn't have to do anything that would hurt big sister Dung Thi or your wife... Dung Thi was good to me and treated me like a blood sister. Your wife was a mischievous little girl, but she was filial and treated me like her aunt.'

Widow Li clasped her hands tightly. 'But three years ago after I sent back one of Yan Jing's many letters... Princess Kang Hua delivered me a bottle of herbs and

a letter. She ordered me to put some herbs into big sister Dung Thi's bowl of soup each day... I didn't know what the herbs were but I suspected it was poison. I followed Princess Kang Hua's order and big sister Dung Thi was slowly poisoned... after a year the bottle of herbs was empty and big sister Dung Thi returned to the heavens.'

Pei Jin fisted his hands while he listened to widow Li's confession. 'Widow Li, what was in the letter that Yan Jing sent to my wife's mother?'

Widow Li pulled out an old letter she carried around in her pouch and passed it to Pei Jin.

Pei Jin read the old letter, 'Dung Dung, looking at the past I can only see my heavy conscience. Today I feel like I have received my retribution for abandoning you to take responsibility of a child I thought was mine. I don't dare to hope you'll forgive me. I only want you to return to me so I can compensate you for the rest of my life.'

Pei Jin was shocked, Yan Jing doubted Yan Shi Ting was his blood daughter.

Pei Jin regained his composure and spoke coldly. 'Widow Li, if you're holding onto this old letter then perhaps you're holding onto another old letter.'

Widow Li's shaky hands pulled out Princess Kang Hua's letter about the bottle of herbs out of her pouch and passed it to Pei Jin.

Pei Jin laughed coldly. 'Widow Li, you thought of a way to protect yourself long ago. Did you keep these old letters to prove your innocence or to extort money from Princess Kang Hua?'

Widow Li nodded her head. At first she kept the letters because she was scared old nurse maid and Princess Kang Hua would report her to the magistrate for adultery and murder. She didn't expect Princess Kang Hua would send someone to kill her.

'Did Princess Kang Hua send someone to kill me and my older cousin?' widow Li asked.

Pei Jin put the letters in his inner robes. 'Widow Li, if it wasn't Princess Kang Hua then who else would waste their energy to send someone to kill you?'

‘Your wife... does she know...’ widow Li asked.

‘Do you want my wife to know?’ Pei Jin asked.

Widow Li shook her head.

Pei Jin left the shelter and returned to the manor.

Yan Shi Ning was waiting anxiously in the chamber for a long time and she was relieved Pei Jin finally returned.

‘Where did you go?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘It’s the middle of the afternoon!’

Pei Jin smiled and passed Yan Shi Ning a stick of dried dates. ‘I went to buy dried dates for you.’

Yan Shi Ning scoffed and accepted the dried dates.

Later that afternoon Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning ate an afternoon meal with Yan Jing and Yan Shi Ting, but Princess Kang Hua was absent. After the afternoon meal Yan Jing pulled Pei Jin to the calligraphy room and Yan Shi Ting pulled Yan Shi Ning to a chamber because Yan Shi Ting wanted to boast about the wedding dress.

Yan Shi Ting came out from behind a screen, raised her chin and showed her wedding dress to Yan Shi Ning.

‘Is my wedding dress beautiful?’ Yan Shi Ting asked.

‘Beautiful, little sister will be a beautiful bride,’ Yan Shi Ning praised.

‘Do you want to see me wear it?’ Yan Shi Ting asked.

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head.

Yan Shi Ting walked behind the screen. Yan Shi Ning signalled a maid to leave and Yan Shi Ning followed Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Shi Ning was curious what a pregnant Yan Shi Ting would look like, because Yan Shi Ting didn’t behave like an expectant mother. Behind the screen Yan Shi Ting’s back faced her and Yan Shi Ting was wearing white undergarments. There was nothing unusual about the white undergarments except the blood specks on Yan Shi Ting’s bottom.

Yan Shi Ting turned her head around. ‘Big sister, why are you here?’

Yan Shi Ning hid her suspicions and smiled at Yan Shi Ting. 'Little sister is about to be married off. Of course your big sister wants to help you put on your wedding dress.'

Yan Shi Ning glanced at the blood specks beneath Yan Shi Ting's flat stomach and immediately she wanted to go and find Pei Jin. When she and Pei Jin received the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting's wedding invitation they thought that Yan Shi Ting was pregnant so Pei Jin sent a guard to investigate. The guard reported that the empress and the crown prince told the emperor about Yan Shi Ting's pregnancy.

Yan Shi Ning helped Yan Shi Ting put on the wedding dress faster than she wore a dress. Then she ran to Pei Jin and dragged him to her old chamber.

'Wife, why are you amused?' Pei Jin asked.

'I discovered a secret,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin listened to Yan Shi Ning's discovery. Afterward he glanced in four directions and whispered in her ear. 'Wife, should we tell imperial father?'

'Pei Jin, I can't do something despicable like that,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Did you forget she did something despicable toward you on the night of the harvest festival?' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning remembered how she nearly died that day and her back turned cold.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and he looked out the window. His eyes turned cold the moment he saw Princess Kang Hua in the gardens.

In the gardens Princess Kang Hua was panicking. She received news that an old man and an assassin's dead bodies were found west of the imperial city. But no one heard news about widow Li. She knew that widow Li couldn't have killed the assassin she sent and suspected that someone was protecting widow Li. Before she could find out where widow Li was, a young beggar came to the Yan Manor. The young beggar showed her two letters and demanded one thousand silver taels... the calligraphy of the two letters were identical to hers and Yan Jing's calligraphy. It meant the person who was protecting widow Li knew her biggest secrets about Dung Thi and Yan Shi Ting.

Princess Kang Hua was too anxious to notice Pei Jin was smiling coldly above the gardens.

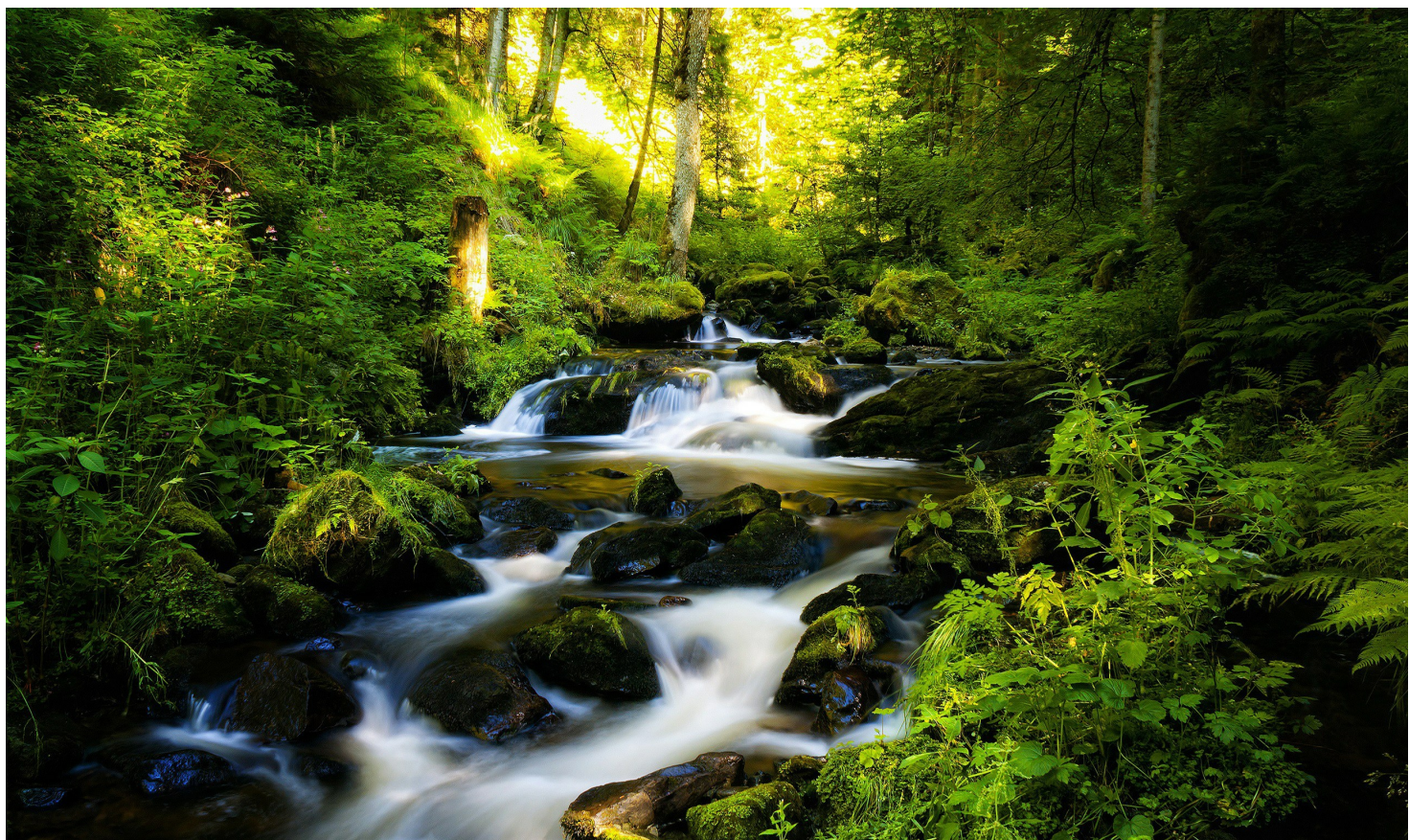
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End of Chapter Thirty-Three

***Related***

# Thirty-Four





## Chapter Thirty-Four

‘Widow Li sent me to receive one thousand silver taels,’ the young beggar said.

Princess Kang Hua’s eyes were on the verge of falling out. For the last few days a different young beggar delivered copies of the same two letters and demanded one thousand taels each morning. Each morning she was furious, anxious and helpless. She sent a servant to follow the young beggars but the servant would always report the same bad news, the young beggars would disappear amongst the crowded imperial city.

Princess Kang Hua’s fears ate her silver taels and her health, she fell ill.

Yan Shi Ting didn’t understand why her mother who was always healthy was suddenly ill.

That day the owner of Lady Su’s dressmaker’s shop, Gentleman Su visited the Yan Manor and showed Yan Shi Ting new fabrics and dress samples.

‘Lady Yan, I personally came here to show you the new fabrics that ninth prince’s wife doesn’t own,’ Gentleman Su said.

Yan Shi Ting knew Gentleman Su wanted to gain her favor. She was frustrated to death that Gentleman Su used to show the worthless Yan Shi Ning new fabrics and dresses before her. She was going to be the crown prince’s wife, how could

she lose to Yan Shi Ning who was married to an unfavored prince?

‘I’ll buy all the new fabrics you brought here this morning,’ Yan Shi Ting said. ‘Wait here, I’ll go get a paper note to pay you.’

Yan Shi Ting walked to her mother’s room and asked her mother for one thousand silver taels.

‘Shi Ting, you have enough dresses for you to wear after your wedding,’ Princess Kang Hua said. ‘Why do you need to buy more new fabrics?’

‘Mother, I love the new fabrics,’ Yan Shi Ting sulked.

Princess Kang Hua lost most of her silver taels but she couldn’t tell her daughter the truth. ‘Shi Ting, be reasonable!’

Yan Shi Ting was used to getting everything she wanted so her mother’s refusal hurt her ears. ‘Mother, it’s only fabrics. Why did you say I’m being unreasonable? These past few days you have been acting strange. Last time the owner of the jade shop visited, you said I could buy as many jade bracelets that I wanted. Mother, if you’re not going to let me spend the silver taels then who are you saving the silver taels for?’

Princess Kang Hua slapped her daughter’s cheek. ‘Shi Ting, close your mouth!’

Yan Shi Ting touched her sore cheek and cried, no one had ever hit her before.

‘Mother, you hit me!’ Yan Shi Ting shrieked and ran out of her mother’s chamber.

‘Princess, what happened?’ old nursemaid asked. ‘Why did you hit second mistress?’

‘What do I do now?’ Princess Kang Hua asked.

‘Princess, wake up,’ old nursemaid said. ‘You can’t fall like this.’

‘That’s right,’ Princess Kang Hua muttered. ‘I can’t fall like this... I didn’t do anything wrong! It’s all their fault! Why should I be scared of them?’

‘Princess, that’s right,’ old nursemaid said. ‘You shouldn’t be scared of them.’

Princess Kang Hua felt her usual cold arrogance returned.

Gentleman Su acted disappointed Yan Shi Ting changed her mind and didn’t

want to buy the new fabrics. But on the way to Pei Jin's manor, his grin was wider than the new fabrics next to him.

At Pei Jin's manor, Gentleman Su discussed Princess Kang Hua's situation with Pei Jin and Bei Dou.

'It appears Princess Kang Hua is a pauper,' Gentleman Su said. 'She's paranoid and in a depressed state. Earlier I saw Lady Yan ran out of Princess Kang Hua's chamber crying. Xiao Jin, indeed you know how to use another person's dagger to slowly cut flesh off.'

'I didn't do anything,' Pei Jin said innocently.

Gentleman Su laughed. 'You're right. You didn't do anything. You only found some young beggars to do it for you. Today one of the young beggars asked me why I didn't ask them to do it three times a day. Morning, afternoon and evening instead of once a day.'

'Once a day is enough,' Pei Jin said. 'Anymore I fear Princess Kang Hua can't cope. I need her alive for the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting's wedding day. It's more amusing to see her slowly rot.'

'Luckily I haven't done anything to offend you,' Gentleman Su said. 'Otherwise I wouldn't know I was dying slowly.'

'Of course you have offended me,' Pei Jin said. 'Each time you send a new dress here, you raise the price.'

'What offence?' Gentleman Su asked. 'My money is your money. Think of it as me helping invest your money. Look at the profits I've given you all these years. But you haven't even thanked me once. Of course after you succeed, remember to let me become the treasurer. At that time it doesn't matter how much money is in the palace, I'm certain I'll help you double it.'

Pei Jin laughed. 'Do you think it's easy to be a treasurer?'

'How hard can it be?' Gentleman Su asked. 'I think you're father-in-law does have brain. What do you want me to do next? Do you want me to send gifts to the Yan Manor?'

'For now let my father-in-law find out on his own,' Pei Jin said.

‘I understand,’ Gentleman Su said. ‘I’ll choose a good day to show the accounting books of dresses, shoes and jewellery Lady Yan bought. It’s a large sum, Yan Jing wouldn’t have that many silver taels. He’ll ask me to look for Princess Kang Hua... she’ll ask me to look for Yan Jing and he’ll wonder why she’s a pauper. What about Lady Yan’s fake pregnancy?’

‘I want Yan Shi Ting’s pregnancy to be exposed in front of imperial father,’ Pei Jin said. ‘So I need to wait until the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting’s wedding day. But I haven’t thought of a way to expose her without leaving a trace.’

‘You can borrow someone else’s dagger,’ Bei Dou said.

‘Whose dagger?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Xiao Dou is right,’ Gentleman Su said. ‘How can this news spread to seventh prince?’

One of Pei Jin’s guards, Xiao Ping entered Bei Dou’s chamber.

‘Ninth prince, I found out who owns Fu Qing,’ Xiao Ping said.

‘Who?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘Seventh prince,’ Xiao Ping said.

Pei Jin smiled and looked at Bei Dou. ‘Bei Dou, it appears tonight you’ll need to climb walls.’

Bei Dou’s goose bumps warned him that he would also be taking three warm baths that night.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t ask what Pei Jin did during the day. All she knew was the MF Pei Jin ate her in bed from night to dawn. Each morning she would wake up with a sore waist, back, neck and thighs. After a few nights rolling on the bed with him, she began to adjust to the different positions. But she hadn’t adjusted to waking up late in the mornings, neither did her temper. Because she overheard a new rumor spread throughout the imperial city, gentle ninth prince’s wife loves to sleep and doesn’t wake up until midday.

Yan Shi Ning thought her gentle lady image was ruined. How could a gentle lady wake up at midday? So that night she carried a blanket and pillow to sleep in a different chamber. But the following morning she woke up and saw the MF

Pei Jin laid next to her. Afterward he ate her until midday.

Finally Yan Shi Ning couldn't hold back her temper and gave Pei Jin three conditions if he wanted to sleep with her.

'Only once a day?' Pei Jin asked.

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Each time no longer than half a shichen hour?' Pei Jin asked.

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's shoulders and shook her body. 'Wife, wake up. Don't dream anymore.'

Yan Shi Ning felt pitiful, day or night there were red kiss marks all over her body.

Pei Jin pulled the blanket over his and Yan Shi Ning's naked bodies. He watched her fall asleep. He knew she wanted a carefree life so he wanted to give her a carefree life. He was willing to silently help her chase away her shadows.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Four

***Related***



# Thirty-Five



## Chapter Thirty-Five

The heavens didn't grant Pei Jin's wish.

That day Pei Jin and Bei Dou were out buying medicine while Yan Shi Ning stayed at the manor watching young maids play in the gardens. She wanted to join them, but gentle ninth prince's wife needed to be dignified. Also, her dresses felt a little tighter than usual. She remembered last night when she was bathing, her breasts looked a little bigger too.

'Mistress, thirteenth prince is here,' a servant announced.

Yan Shi Ning wondered if Pei Khan came to visit because a while ago she pinched his cheeks in the palace and said that when he was free, he could visit her and Pei Jin.

Pei Khan never left the palace since he was born. After he heard ninth sister said he could visit her and ninth brother, he was deeply moved.

Consort La thought Pei Khan's request to visit Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin was a good opportunity for Pei Khan to bond with Yan Shi Ning. She waited for ninth prince to recover then she asked the emperor's permission to let Pei Khan visit Pei Jin's manor.

The emperor consented and sent imperial guards with Pei Khan to Pei Jin's manor.

The moment Pei Khan saw Yan Shi Ning, he jumped into her arms and looked around for Pei Jin.

'Nin, Nin?' Pei Khan asked.

Yan Shi Ning carried Pei Khan to the gardens closer to her chamber.

‘Your ninth brother is out,’ Yan Shi Ning said. She signalled a maid. ‘Bring buns and sweets for thirteenth prince.’

Pei Khan was a little disappointed Pei Jin was out, but he was happy he could to play with Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning thought about what she could play with Pei Khan and remembered the cuju ball Pei Jin brought home a while ago. ‘Thirteenth brother, let’s play cuju.’

In the past Yan Shi Ning loved to play cuju in Xuan Qing. She put Pei Khan on the ground and ran to get the cuju ball from the chamber.

Pei Khan happily played with the cuju ball. If he kicked too far, his short legs would run little steps after the cuju ball.

Yan Shi Ning, the maids, the servants and the imperial guards smiled and watched Pei Khan chased the ball. Pei Khan’s expression was serious and he didn’t allow anyone to retrieve the cuju ball for him.

Pei Khan kicked the cuju further after each kick. But after his strongest kick the cuju ball flew and landed in the well.

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Khan’s sad round eyes and consoled him. ‘Thirteenth brother, I’ll make you a new cuju ball to play with.’

Pei Khan nodded his head. Yan Shi Ning knew it would take too long to make a cuju ball from fabrics and decided it was quicker to use paper. She picked up Pei Khan and carried him to Pei Jin’s calligraphy room.

Inside Pei Jin’s calligraphy room, Yan Shi Ning and Pei Khan collected torn paper on the floor and on the table. Then she showed Pei Khan how to flatten the torn paper and scrunched it into small paper balls.

Pei Khan thought it was too easy and quickly made a pile of small paper balls.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ning glanced at one of the torn paper she picked up... Yan Jing. She read it carefully and the torn paper slipped out of her hands in her shocked state.

Pei Jin returned to the manor and heard Pei Khan came to visit and was inside

the calligraphy room with Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin entered the calligraphy room and saw Pei Khan was sitting on the floor happily making small paper balls. But Yan Shi Ning sat on a chair in front of the table and she had the look of despair on her face. He glanced at the torn paper on the table and realised he forgot to burn the last copy of the letters.

Pei Jin carried Pei Khan to Bei Dou's chamber and asked Bei Dou to play with Pei Khan for a while. Then he rushed back to the calligraphy room and sat next to Yan Shi Ning.

'Pei Jin...' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. 'Shi Ning, let me explain.'

Yan Shi Ning pushed Pei Jin away. 'Why do you need to copy my father and Princess Kang Hua's calligraphy? Why?'

Pei Jin didn't know what to say.

'What did she put in my mother's bowl of soup?' Yan Shi Ning asked. She looked down at the torn paper on the table that was wet from her tears. 'Pei Jin, why didn't you tell me?'

Yan Shi Ning avoided Pei Jin's touch. 'Pei Jin, you knew everything that happened but you didn't tell me anything! Why? Tell me, what did she put in my mother's bowl of soup?'

Pei Jin's heart ached to see Yan Shi Ning cry. 'Poison herbs.'

Yan Shi Ning remembered that year her mother's health slowly declined... until her mother died. 'Mother...'

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning, her body was shaking and she sobbed loudly. 'Shi Ning, calm down.'

Yan Shi Ning wrapped her arms around Pei Jin's shoulders and sobbed on his neck. 'Why did she need to kill my mother? Why? My mother didn't do anything to her. My mother never fought with her. Why did she still want to kill my mother? Pei Jin, I want to kill her!'

Pei Jin heard Yan Shi Ning sob until her voice became hoarse. He didn't want her to lose her voice and reluctantly struck her unconscious.



Yan Shi Ning dreamt her father and Princess Kang Hua killed her mother. She was tied to a chair and couldn't save her mother. 'Mother... mother...'

Yan Shi Ning was startled awake. She opened her eyes and saw Pei Jin was lying next to her in bed but she didn't know what time it was.

'Shi Ning, what's wrong?'

'Pei Jin, I want to kill her!' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I want them to die suffering!'

'I'll help you avenge your mother's death,' Pei Jin promised.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin would keep his promise and she sobbed loudly for her lost mother.

After Yan Shi Ning tired herself to sleep from sobbing, Pei Jin returned to Bei Dou's chamber. Pei Jin hugged Bei Dou then the imperial guards escorted Bei Dou back to the palace.

'What happened?' Bei Dou asked.

'My wife knows,' Pei Jin said.

'That's good,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin frowned. 'Why do I feel you're too happy about it?'

'If your wife becomes stronger, it's good for you,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin felt he failed to protect her.

'Your wife is naturally a strong person,' Bei Dou said. 'But you're too protective of her.'

Pei Jin sighed. 'You're right, my wife is a strong person. She's stronger and is more vengeful than I thought.'

'Of course a little lion has different blood to an ordinary person,' Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin turned the jade ring around his finger for a while.

Pei Jin remembered a lost memory. He remembered a drunkard was about to assault Yan Shi Ning's mother but Yan Shi Ning pulled out a knife and scared the drunkard away.

'Your wife knows everything?' Bei Dou asked.

‘Not yet,’ Pei Jin said. ‘She’s in a turmoil state and can’t process too many thoughts. But I think she’ll recover too quickly and force me to tell her everything.’

Pei Jin didn’t want to tell Yan Shi Ning that Princess Kang Hua not only killed her mother, but Princess Kang Hua wanted to kill her too.

‘I don’t know how my wife wants to avenge her mother’s death,’ Pei Jin said. ‘But I know anyone who dares harm her or someone she loves, she would make that person suffer a hundred times more than she suffered.’

‘You and your wife are even more compatible than I thought,’ Bei Dou said.

The following day, Yan Shi Ning quietly sat on a chair and thought for the whole day.

Pei Jin’s biggest fear was hatred consuming Yan Shi Ning’s head.

Pei Jin wasn’t going to let his biggest fear become real. He knelt in front of Yan Shi Ning, propped his chin between her closed knees and looked up pitifully at her. ‘Wife, I’m lonely because you neglected me for the whole day.’

Yan Shi Ning looked at Pei Jin’s pitiful face and her pursed lips relaxed. She knew he was worried about her and wanted to make her laugh. It lessen the cold sensation in her heart.

‘Wife, your husband is a gentleman,’ Pei Jin said pitifully. ‘Why do you want to neglect me?’

Yan Shi Ning stroked Pei Jin’s ears, held his face and kissed his lips.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning’s kiss was filled with gratefulness and light after a dark night.

The maids and servants quickly left the chamber and closed the door.

‘Pei Jin,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Um?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Do you want me?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin understood and carried Yan Shi Ning to their bed.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Five

***Related***

## part 1



The setting sun – is unspeakably beautiful, only it is approaching nightfall (Li Shangyin).

All ages are beautiful. HBAG – Chapter Thirty-Six (Part 1) contains mature content. Readers need to be of a beautiful mature age to read chapter thirty-six (Part 1).

### **Chapter Thirty-Six (Part 1)**

Yan Shi Ning undressed Pei Jin and herself then she pushed him onto the bed. She straddled his legs, his hands cupped her breasts and she mounted him.

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning's pursed lips and their tongues swirled together. He knew she hated pain, usually he would wait until she was wet between her thighs before joining their bodies. Her initiating their lovemaking flamed his desire and pierced his heart, he knew she was counteracting her mental pain with physical pain.

Yan Shi Ning pressed her palms on Pei Jin's chest and sat still above him. He was deep inside her and the pain helped numb the pain in her heart. He caressed her lower back and kissed the tears on her face. His tenderness made her forget pain and she began to ride him. Each time she raised and lowered her body, he penetrated her deeper.

A long time later Yan Shi Ning's body spasmed, Pei Jin's body climaxed and

spurted semen inside her.

The following morning Pei Jin woke up and was happy there was no distant look in Yan Shi Ning's eyes but she was staring intensely at the ceiling.

Pei Jin rolled over and rubbed himself between Yan Shi Ning's thighs. 'Wife, last night you were so strong. This morning my waist and back hurts. But... it was pleasurable. Wife, do you want me again?'

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Jin's teasing words and she blushed.

'Pei Jin, are you hiding anything else from me?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin reluctantly rolled off Yan Shi Ning's body and explained everything to Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning's body turned cold after she heard Princess Kang Hua wanted to kill her too.

'So you didn't eat me on our wedding night because I was poisoned?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'My wife is more intelligent than I thought,' Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning kicked Pei Jin's leg and berated herself for wasting energy by thinking he was a gentleman who truly wanted to wait until she was willing.

Pei Jin caught Yan Shi Ning's leg and wrapped it around his waist. 'Wife, let's talk about something more primitive.'

Yan Shi Ning bit Pei Jin's arm and vented a little of her anger.

Pei Jin rubbed his pitiful arm. 'Wife, what plan did you think of?'

Yan Shi Ning didn't believe Pei Jin didn't act out a plan of his own after he knew her mother was killed. 'Pei Jin, you can tell me what you've done first.'

Pei Jin confessed about how he had been slowly making Princess Kang Hua suffer.

'You're too soft on her,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I want her to suffer more.'

'Wife, what do you want to do?' Pei Jin asked.

'She wants her daughter to be the crown prince's wife,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I

don't want her wish to be granted. I want Yan Shi Ting's fake pregnancy exposed on her wedding day and I want all of them to die suffering.'

'Wife, we shared the same thoughts,' Pei Jin said. 'I've sent Bei Dou to spread the news at Fu Qing. I forgot to tell you, the owner of Fu Qing is seventh brother.'

'Seventh prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Um,' Pei Jin said. 'In the past I wondered how seventh brother gained many supporters. Now I know he used his supporters' secrets to blackmail them.'

'Is that why you plan to borrow his dagger?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'The crown prince marrying Yan Shi Ting isn't a serious threat to seventh brother,' Pei Jin said. 'But after seventh brother knows the truth, he won't resist to damage the crown prince's credibility in front of imperial father. I know seventh brother will wait until the wedding to expose Yan Shi Ting's deceit. Then seventh brother will think he's the biggest winner after the Yan Manor, the empress and the crown prince's reputations are ruined.'

'Doesn't it mean we're helping seventh prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'It doesn't have to mean we're helping seventh brother,' Pei Jin said.

'Pei Jin, do you want to become the emperor?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning thought that Pei Jin was most suited to be the emperor compared to his brothers.

Pei Jin saw Yan Shi Ning was truly curious and he whispered something in her ear.

Yan Shi Ning heard what Pei Jin whispered and she smiled.

'You want to take revenge on the empress and I want to take revenge on Princess Kang Hua,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'This way they'll both pay with their blood and lives.'

'What about Yan Jing?' Pei Jin asked.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Six (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Thirty-Six (Part 2 of 2)

‘He’s my father,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘But his ambition is the reason why my mother was killed. I don’t need him to die. It’s enough that he loses his position in the imperial court.’

Pei Jin nodded his head. He couldn’t predict what his father would do to Yan Jing. But if his father wanted to execute Yan Jing then he would make a little plea to save Yan Jing’s life, because he and Yan Shi Ning knew in Yan Jing’s eyes being demoted was worse than dying.

‘Wife, why do you think Yan Jing suspects Yan Shi Ting isn’t his blood daughter?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘Why hasn’t he done anything to investigate the situation all these years? He’s not someone who would spare a person for deceiving him. I’ve sent someone to investigate Yan Shi Ting’s birth, but I haven’t received any evidence.’



‘Perhaps he’s either misunderstood or is certain Yan Shi Ting isn’t his daughter,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘It’s possible Princess Kang Hua convinced him that he has no evidence to confirm his suspicions. But you said that Princess Kang Hua panicked after she received copies of those two letters. So I think Yan Shi Ting isn’t my father’s blood daughter.’

‘Pei Jin, I want you to give me one of those letters,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I want to show it my father. I want to see what his reaction is when he knows the daughter he loved since she was born isn’t his blood daughter.’

‘Yan-Shi-Ning!’ Pei Jin cried out. ‘Give back my loveable lively little lion!’

Yan Shi Ning smiled at Pei Jin. ‘Pei Jin, don’t worry. I’m still me, I won’t change.’

At the Yan Manor, Yan Jing thought that recently nothing had been smooth for him. He was ashamed of his youngest daughter’s behaviour before her wedding, it caused him to lose the emperor’s favor. Princess Kang Hua’s health was suddenly poor and Gentleman Su asked him to pay for the costs of Yan Shi Ting’s dresses and shoes.

Yan Jing did want to pay Gentleman Su, but the total cost shook his body and he asked Gentleman Su to receive the silver taels from Princess Kang Hua.

‘Prime Minister Yan, I did ask Princess Kang Hua,’ Gentleman Su said. ‘But she said she was unwell and asked me to come back another day. Honestly, I need the money to pay my merchants and dressmakers.’

Yan Jing tactfully asked Gentleman Su to come back another day then he looked for Princess Kang Hua in the Yan Manor. He didn’t know how many silver taels Princess Kang Hua possessed and he had never asked. But he knew she wasn’t a pauper so he couldn’t understand why she couldn’t pay Gentleman Su.

Yan Jing found Princess Kang Hua in her chamber and he asked her about the silver taels owed to Gentleman Su.

‘My silver taels has no relation to you,’ Princess Kang Hua said coldly.

Yan Jing thought Princess Kang Hua’s cold arrogance was too much. He suppressed his disdain and retreated toward the calligraphy room.

On the way to the calligraphy room Yan Jing was surprised to see his oldest daughter arrived at the Yan Manor to visit him.

‘Shi Ning?’ Yan Jing asked.

Yan Shi Ning smiled charmingly at Yan Jing. ‘Father, I came to give Shi Ting a pair of jade bracelets. It’ll look beautiful on her wrists.’

Yan Jing was proud of his oldest daughter who was gentle and considerate. ‘Shi Ning, you’re a good person.’

Yan Jing accepted the jade bracelets and he noticed Yan Shi Ning hesitated to ask him something. ‘Shi Ning, is something wrong?’

Yan Shi Ning bit her lower lip and spoke in a shaky voice. ‘Father... I... this... I didn’t intend to tell father about this. But forgive me father, I can’t hide this from you.’

Yan Jing had never seen Yan Shi Ning looked so sad and anxious like she did that she did that day. ‘Shi Ning, if anything bad happened you can tell me and I promise I’ll give you justice.’

Yan Shi Ning’s heart laughed coldly. She pulled out a letter and passed it to Yan Jing. ‘Father, last night someone delivered this to my husband’s manor. After I read it I was shocked and I wanted to ask father about this.’

Yan Jing read the letter and his body stiffened, it was clearly the letter he wrote to Dung Thi... it was his calligraphy and the same paper he used that year.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Six (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Thirty-Seven



## Chapter Thirty-Seven

After Yan Shi Ning left, Yan Jing paced the calligraphy room.

A while later, Yan Shi Ting's frown changed into a smile and she wanted to fly. She acted reluctant to receive the pair of jade bracelets from Yan Shi Ning, but she loved the jade bracelets.

Yan Jing strode into Yan Shi Ting's chamber while she was admiring the jade bracelets.

Yan Shi Ting looked up at her father who appeared upset about something. 'Father, what's wrong?'

Yan Jing sat beside Yan Shi Ting. A maid was about to pour tea for him but he stopped the maid.

'Pour me a bowl of water,' Yan Jing said.

‘Father, why do you want to drink water?’ Yan Shi Ting asked. ‘This is rare tea, the empress gave it to me.’

Yan Jing held Yan Shi Ting’s hand and smiled at her while the maid poured water.

‘Shi Ting, you’re an adult now and about to be start your own family,’ Yan Jing said.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ting felt a sharp pain on her finger and retrieved her hand.

‘Father, what happened?’ Yan Shi Ting asked.

Yan Jing was satisfied a drop of blood fell into the bowl of water. ‘Nothing. I think this bowl is dirty. I’m going to exchange it for a clean bowl.’

Yan Jing didn’t wait for Yan Shi Ting’s reply, he carried the bowl of water outside.

In the courtyard Yan Jing pricked his finger and a drop of blood fell into the bowl of water. Indeed his blood and Yan Shi Ting’s blood didn’t merge and he flung the bowl of water onto the ground.

Yan Shi Ting was startled by the strange sounds of a broken bowl.

Yan Jing didn’t know how he left Yan Shi Ting’s courtyard. His legs felt heavy, his whole body felt cold and his hands were shaky. Princess Kang Hua deceived him for more than sixteen years!

Yan Jing remembered that year Yan Shi Ting was born.

‘Little sister Hua, is Shi Ting my blood daughter?’ Yan Jing asked. ‘Say it clearly!’

‘Big brother, what else do you want?’ Princess Kang Hua asked. ‘Aren’t you wearing the headgear you wanted? If you don’t believe me then I’ll die for you to see. How can you suspect I would deceive you about this? Look at Shi Ting, doesn’t she look like you? Look, her blood and your blood merged. What else do you want?’

Yan Jing’s heart was teared to pieces. He was a prime minister of a kingdom but his second wife and her daughter deceived him for more than sixteen years! He wore a headgear of a fool for more than sixteen years! Indeed it was a

laughable situation.

A while later Yan Jing kicked down Princess Kang Hua's door.

'Everyone leave!' Yan Jing ordered the frightened maids and servants while he looked coldly at Princess Kang Hua.

Princess Kang Hua was married to Yan Jing for many years. She knew if he was angry and didn't want anyone to hear what he wanted to say to her then it was something shameful... her face whitened, perhaps Yan Jing received those two letters.

'Everyone hurry and go outside!' Princess Kang Hua ordered the maids and servants that were stalling inside the chamber.

After the maids and servants left, the atmosphere in the chamber was tensed and silent.

Princess Kang Hua refused to open her mouth first. She didn't want to confess anything she wasn't forced to.

Yan Jing was repulsed by Princess Kang Hua's beautiful face. 'Kang Hua, I haven't mistreated you. Why did you deceive me to this extent?'

'I... I... what did I lie to you about?' Princess Kang Hua denied.

Yan Jing heard Princess Kang Hua's lie and his head ached. 'You still want to deceive me? Say it clearly, is Yan Shi Ting yours and your older cousin's daughter? No, she isn't a Yan! That bastard child doesn't suit to be a Yan!'

Princess Kang Hua felt like there were coffins in all four directions. Indeed paper couldn't defeat fire and her deceit was exposed.

'You don't need to deceive me anymore!' Yan Jing said. 'I know everything! Earlier I tested that bastard child's blood and my blood. You can't deceive me anymore. Kang Hua, I truly want to kill you. Because of you, I left my wife and daughter. But you treated me like a fool. You're scum! Scum!'

Yan Jing swore and cried for a long time. Indeed he was an unpleasant sight.

Princess Kang Hua dug her fingernails into her palms and she looked at the angry man in front of her. Suddenly everything ended. The days and years of anxiety finally ended.

Princess Kang Hua straightened her back and looked coldly at Yan Jing. 'What can you do?'

Princess Kang Hua realised it no longer mattered that Yan Jing knew the truth.

'You dare to kill me?' Princess Kang Hua asked. 'Do you dare to tell everyone Shi Ting isn't your blood daughter? Do you dare to tell everyone she is the daughter of your second wife rolling in bed with another man? Yan Jing, I know you well. You value pride, reputation and status of a prime minister. You wouldn't cause yourself to lose dignity even if your true heart is ugly. In front of other people you would act dignified. Prime Minister Yan, isn't he someone other people respect? What respect? You wouldn't be prime minister if you didn't marry me! You say that I'm scum. But between the two of us, who is more of a scum?'

Yan Jing's face paled, he couldn't refute Princess Kang Hua's words.

Princess Kang Hua smiled coldly. 'Even if Shi Ting is a bastard child and isn't a Yan or even if you're disgusted, you can only tell everyone she is your daughter! Don't forget, the wedding is in three days. Yan Jing, that year because of your ambition you abandoned your wife and daughter. Today because you were deceived for more than sixteen years, can you abandon this marriage? Abandon the chance to be the future emperor's grandfather?'

Yan Jing didn't refute Princess Kang Hua's words. He silently stared at her cold arrogant face and felt his heart rotted. It was true, he wouldn't kill her or expose Yan Shi Ting's identity. He was going to swallow his grievances otherwise another person would use it as an opportunity to steal his position.

Yan Jing felt defeated. 'You're right! I desire success and status. This is my retribution. Kang Hua, from today onward there is no marriage between us. I never want to see you again.'

Princess Kang Hua watched the man she loved for decades leave without looking back at her. She sat and the memories appeared in her head.

Princess Kang Hua remembered that year she was a young lady. Her young self saw Yan Jing for the first time, he rode a horse. Afterward she met him at the former prime minister's manor and decided she wasn't going to marry anyone else but him. She confessed to him but he rejected her because he had a wife. So

she put lust herbs into his wine and he slept with her. The following morning she was certain he would take responsibility but he rejected her again and apologised to her.

Princess Kang Hua thought her young self was laughable. She was a princess and lowered herself to love that kind of man but he rejected her love! From that day she vowed she would do anything to hold onto the man she loved. So she lied to Yan Jing, 'I'm pregnant. Big brother, if you don't marry me then I'll tell everyone about what you did. I'm a princess, I'm not going to accept being a second wife. You have to divorce your wife.'

Yan Jing rejected the young Princess Kang Hua again. He said he would rather die than divorce his wife and she was forced to accept being a second wife.

After Yan Jing married Princess Kang Hua, she thought her fake pregnancy would become a real pregnancy. But he rejected her again, 'You're pregnant, there's no hurry.'

The newly wedded Princess Kang Hua anxiously watched a few days past then she thought of a plan and acted out her plan. She remembered that night was a sensual night but it wasn't with the man she loved. So each time she remembered that night, her heart ached.

Princess Kang Hua's memories faded and she absently walked around the gardens.

A leaf fell onto the ground. Princess Kang Hua picked it up, the leaf was brown like her heart. More than sixteen years of marriage disappeared in front of her. It ripped off her mask and ended her love. She smiled coldly and muttered to herself. 'I still have Shi Ting! I have a daughter that will be empress! That's enough! I wasn't wrong! Everything happened because those people forced me!'

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End of Chapter Thirty-Seven

***Related***

## part 1



### Chapter Thirty-Eight (Part 1)

The crown prince and Yan Shi Ting's wedding day was fated to be an auspicious day for some guests.

At the Yan Manor, the bride woke up early, wore her wedding dress and makeup.

'Mother, have you noticed father has been strange the last three days?' Yan Shi Ting asked. 'He acts distant when I talk to him.'

'Perhaps he's busy with work,' Princess Kang Hua lied.

'Yes, you're right,' Yan Shi Ting said.

At Pei Jin's manor, Yan Shi Ning prepared the wedding gifts.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, you need to be careful.'



Yan Shi Ning kissed Pei Jin's lips. 'If I'm uncertain about the outcome then I won't act.'

Pei Jin nodded his head. 'I think seventh brother's people are prepared too. Let them expose Yan Shi Ting's deceit so we can watch an amusing performance. If seventh brother acts out a plan, he won't be merciful.'

Night and day, Pei Jin cautioned Yan Shi Ning enough to make her laugh helplessly. 'Pei Jin, when did you become a woman?'

Pei Jin rubbed his face on Yan Shi Ning's neck. 'I'm scared my little lion will be scared if she sees fresh blood.'

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's lips on her neck and pushed him away. 'Pei Jin, I know. Umm... don't take off my dress... it took me a long time to wear it... umm...'

Pei Jin pouted his lips. He didn't get to eat Yan Shi Ning but she got to hit him. 'Wife, you don't even let me touch you.'

Yan Shi Ning wanted to vomit blood. 'If you want someone to touch then you can marry a second wife.'

Pei Jin rubbed his chin and nodded his head. 'That's a good sugges-'

Yan Shi Ning kicked Pei Jin's leg. 'Pei Jin, do you dare?'

Pei Jin laughed. He knew it was nearly time for the wedding so he adjusted Yan Shi Ning's dress. 'Wife, be careful inside the palace and at the Yan Manor. I'm worried Princess Kang Hua found out about the plan.'

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head.

'Remember today we need to perform well inside the palace,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning pinched Pei Jin's ear. 'I know.'

Pei Jin escorted Yan Shi Ning to the horse carriage. Afterward he instructed Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai. 'Protect my wife and be weary of the princess.'

'Yes ninth prince,' Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai promised.

Unfortunately Pei Jin was the groom's brother and needed to wait at the palace for the bride while Yan Shi Ning was the bride's sister and needed to go to

the Yan Manor and escort the bride to the palace.

The moment Yan Shi Ning arrived at the Yan Manor, she saw Yan Jing was welcoming guests. Her heart laughed coldly at the fake smile on Yan Jing's face.

Yan Shi Ning remembered a few days ago after she gave the letter to Yan Jing she returned home and asked Pei Jin to send Xiao Zai to eavesdrop at the Yan Manor.

Pei Jin confided in Yan Shi Ning that Xiao Zai had a special talent for eavesdropping. She didn't believe Pei Jin until Xiao Zai returned to the manor and reported Yan Jing and Princess Kang Hua's conversation without omitting anything. Also, Xiao Zai had a special talent of mimicking other people's voices. She was impressed after hearing Xiao Zai mimicked Yan Jing and Princess Kang Hua's voices.

Yan Jing spotted Yan Shi Ning, he smiled gratefully at her and escorted her to the bride's courtyard.

Yan Shi Ning kindly reminded Yan Jing to 'remember to rest' then she walked toward the bride's chamber.

On the way to Yan Shi Ting's chamber, Yan Shi Ning saw Princess Kang Hua in the courtyard and she smiled politely.

Princess Kang Hua straightened her back and looked wearily at Yan Shi Ning. She didn't understand why Yan Shi Ning used to lower her head and didn't dare to look at her but suddenly Yan Shi Ning dared to look at her on Yan Shi Ting's wedding day. It was Yan Shi Ning's eyes that looked like a hunter staring at a prey that made her wearier. The longer Yan Shi Ning looked at her the more she thought about the young beggars, the two letters, Yan Jing and who was the mysterious person behind everything.

Princess Kang Hua remembered what old nurse maid reported to her.

'Who did master meet that day?' Princess Kang Hua asked. 'Why did he remember his suspicions about Yan Shi Ting's identity?'

'Someone saw ninth prince's wife visited master that day,' old nurse maid said.

Suddenly Princess Kang Hua felt breathless in front of Yan Shi Ning. She raised

her chin and quickly walked past Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning smiled while she watched Princess Kang Hua poorly hide fear.

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End of Chapter Thirty-Eight (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Thirty-Eight (Part 2 of 2)

‘Big sister, you’re here,’ Yan Shi Ting said.

‘It’s little sister’s wedding day,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I’m your big sister of course I need to be here. Today little sister is beautiful. The crown prince will be insanely happy to see you.’

Yan Shi Ting was happy to hear Yan Shi Ning praised her beauty. But she frowned to hear the crown prince’s name mentioned. She didn’t know why the crown prince hadn’t delivered wedding gifts to her yet.

Yan Shi Ning poured two cups of tea and crushed a pill into one of the cups while no was looking at her.

‘Little sister, drink tea,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Later you’ll be too busy to drink.’

Yan Shi Ting was thirsty. Her mother didn’t let her drink earlier so she accepted the cup of tea and drank it.

Yan Shi Ning smiled, drank half a cup of tea and emptied the other half into a vase.

Two days ago Yan Shi Ning received the pills from Bei Dou.

‘Big brother Bei, do you have medicine that causes a person stomach to hurt?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Yes,’ Bei Dou said and showed Yan Shi Ning some identical pills.

‘Do I crush the pills?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘That’s right,’ Bei Dou said.

‘Big brother Bei, can you give me these pills?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Alright,’ Bei Dou said and passed the pills to Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning tested one of the pills on herself. Less than half a shichen hour later her stomach ached and she rushed to the toilet.

After Yan Shi Ning’s legs wobbled from squatting for a long time she returned to Bei Dou’s chamber.

‘Big brother, what pills did you give me earlier?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Laxatives,’ Bei Dou said.

Yan Shi Ning and her stomach were speechless while Bei Dou was curious why Yan Shi Ning wanted laxatives.

Finally the bride and the bridal’s family arrived at the palace. The crown prince smiled coldly but Pei Jin smiled happily like he did on his and Yan Shi Ning’s wedding day.

Pei Jin watched Yan Shi Ning helped the bride into the ceremonial hall and reminisced about their wedding day.

After Yan Shi Ning escorted Yan Shi Ting to the crown prince, she stood next to Pei Jin and he whispered in her ear. ‘Wife, tonight let’s have a wedding night too.’

Yan Shi Ning smiled like a gentle lady and she stepped on Pei Jin’s foot. Then she turned her head and smiled at the anxious Princess Kang Hua.

The emperor and the empress sat on the highest platform. The emperor refrained from frowning while the empress smiled happily.

Pei Zhang wanted to rest but it was the crown prince's wedding day so he attended the wedding and acted weak next to the happy Consort Mu.

Consort Mu looked at Pei Wen Cai who sat on her lap. 'Wen Cai, do you remember what grandmother told you?'

Pei Wen Cai was busy glaring at Pei Khan who sat opposite her. 'Yes, grandmother.'

Pei Khan didn't notice Pei Wen Cai, he was waving his chubby hand at Yan Shi Ning. Then he patted the seat next to him to signal Yan Shi Ning to sit next to him.

Everyone behaved like their usual selves but their eyes were focused on the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting.

'It is the auspicious hour,' the ceremonial minister said. 'The groom and bride, bow to the heavens, your elders and to each other.'

Yan Shi Ting bowed to the heavens and to the elders. But her stomach ached a lot. After bowing to the crown prince, she collapsed on the floor.

The ceremonial hall immediately became chaotic.

Consort Mu exchanged a shocked look with seventh prince... their plan was to let Pei Wen Cai accidentally fall onto Yan Shi Ting's dress, Consort Mu would help Pei Wen Cai up and throw blood onto Yan Shi Ting's wedding dress then Consort Mu would ask for an imperial physician to check if Yan Shi Ting had a miscarriage. The imperial physician that day was one of their allies and would have reported to the emperor that Yan Shi Ting wasn't pregnant.

Consort Mu and seventh prince didn't act out their plan but Yan Shi Ting fell on her own.

Consort Mu rushed to Yan Shi Ting, discreetly threw blood on Yan Shi Ting's dress and helped Yan Shi Ting stand.

'What happened?' the emperor asked.

The empress panicked. 'I... I... I...'

‘Blood, blood!’ Pei Khan cried out and pointed at the blood stain on the floor.

Everyone’s eyes looked at the spot Pei Khan was pointing to.

Yan Shi Ting stood, her veil fell on the floor and she endured her stomach ache. But her body stiffened after she heard blood... the blood was on the spot she fell on earlier.

Yan Shi Ting was scared her step-aunt arrived. She looked at the back of her dress and her face whitened at the blood stain on her dress.

‘Ah!’ Consort Mu cried out. ‘There’s blood on the bride’s dress. Where’s the imperial physician?’

The emperor’s face darkened, he was worried his unborn grandchild returned to the heavens.

‘Hurry, someone bring an imperial physician here!’ the emperor ordered.

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### Short Side Story One

On a cool day, Pei Jin was smiling while watching little Fei sleeping peacefully in a cot. Little Fei’s lips were pouting like little Fei was dreaming about drinking milk. It reminded Pei Jin of a past incident at the Yan Manor.

Pei Jin walked out into the courtyard where Yan Shi Ning was sitting on a swing and eating a peach.

‘Shi Ning, do you believe in testing blood relations using drops of blood and a bowl of water?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘I believe it’s true,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Isn’t that’s how blood relations were tested in the past?’

Pei Jin nodded his head and smiled at Yan Shi Ning. ‘Little lion, let’s see if the test is true.’

‘Pei Jin, what do you want to do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked suspiciously.

A while later, little Fei was awake and crying loudly.

Yan Shi Ning’s heart ached. She carried little Fei in her arms and consoled little Fei.

‘MF Pei Jin, how can you do this to little Fei?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning watched little Fei’s blood dropped into a bowl of water... little Fei’s blood didn’t merge with the other drop of blood.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were shocked.

‘Yan-Shi-Ning!’ Pei Jin cried out. ‘Wife, confess!’

Yan Shi Ning knocked the bowl of water out of Pei Jin’s hand. ‘MF Pei Jin! What are you implying?’

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. ‘Wife, don’t be angry. I was teasing you.’

Yan Shi Ning was too angry to speak anymore.

After that cool day, Pei Jin was banished to the calligraphy room for half a month. He was starved enough for his eye bags to swell and he secretly wrote on a wall, ‘don’t believe in testing blood relations with drops of blood and a bowl of water!’

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### Short Interview One

Su Xing Yue: Xiao Jin, you truly didn’t suspect Xiao Ning?

Pei Jin: I trust Shi Ning isn’t that kind of person.

Su Xing Yue: Why are you certain?

Pei Jin: I roll around with my wife day and night. How can she have time to let me wear a headgear of a fool?

Su Xing Yue: ...

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End of Chapter Thirty-Eight (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***



## part 1



### Chapter Thirty-Nine (Part 1)

The emperor's first grandchild wasn't Pei Wen Cai.

Seventh prince's official wife miscarried a child before Pei Wen Cai, the emperor's first grandchild was a boy and he still grieved for his unborn grandson.

The emperor had thirteen children but only four sons were alive. The seventh prince shared a similar fate with the emperor, he had many wives but they had many miscarriages and only Pei Wen Cai was alive.

The citizens of the Dian kingdom were worried about the lack of future imperial heirs. That was why even though the emperor disapproved of Yan Shi Ting, he tolerated her for the sake of his unborn grandchild. So no one in the imperial family was surprised to see the emperor's concern after seeing Yan Shi Ting bleed.

'Emperor, you don't need to summon an imperial physician,' the empress said. 'It'll be bad luck if the imperial physician appears before the end of the wedding ceremony-'

'Bad luck?' Consort Mu asked. 'Big sister, the bride is bleeding. Her life is more important than superstitions.'

Consort Mu's words stabbed the empress' heart. The empress saw the feigned

concern on Consort Mu's face and she realised it was the demoness Consort Mu who interfered with her scheme. The empress didn't doubt that Consort Mu knew about Yan Shi Ting's fake pregnancy long ago, Consort Mu waited until the wedding day to expose Yan Shi Ting and to appear innocent while opposing the empress.

The emperor ignored the empress and Consort Mu's battle of words.

'Hurry and bring an imperial physician here!' the emperor ordered.

An imperial physician rushed into the ceremonial hall and Yan Shi Ting panicked.

'I don't need an imperial physician,' Yan Shi Ting said.

Yan Shi Ting recognised the imperial physician wasn't one of the empress' allies and wouldn't know about her fake pregnancy. If she was exposed on her wedding day, it would also be the day of her funeral.

Yan Shi Ting knew no one could save her and she couldn't stop the imperial physician from examining her. She cried helplessly and she couldn't endure her stomach ache any longer... she farted and soiled her undergarments.

Everyone around Yan Shi Ting pinched their noses and stepped back from Yan Shi Ting's unpleasant stench.

Yan Shi Ting was angry and embarrassed. She knelt on the floor, covered her face and cried loudly. Her wedding dress was ruined, her makeup disappeared and she looked like a pitiful bride jilted by the groom.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's hand. He knew she wasn't cruel enough to feel happy seeing Yan Shi Ting shed fresh blood from their plan.

'Imperial physician, what happened to Yan Shi Ting?' the emperor asked.

'It was a beautiful wedding ceremony... why did it become like this?' Consort Mu asked. 'Imperial physician, stop stalling. Hurry and examine the crown prince's wife!'

The imperial physician reluctantly stepped closer to Yan Shi Ting. He heard 'the crown prince's wife' and knew the wedding ceremony wouldn't end happily.

'Lady Yan, let me examine you.'

The imperial physician knelt beside Yan Shi Ting but she refused to let him hold her wrist.

‘I don’t need to be examined!’ Yan Shi Ting said.

‘Hurry and let the imperial physician examine you,’ Consort Mu said. ‘You’re bleeding. Can’t you see the emperor is worried about you?’

Yan Shi Ting looked at the emperor’s concerned face. Then she looked pleadingly at the empress and the crown prince. ‘Aunt! Big brother crown prince! The imperial physician doesn’t need to examine me.’

The empress saw everyone was looking at her and her heart hardened. ‘Shi Ting, let the imperial physician examine you.’

Yan Shi Ting’s body turned cold, the empress and the crown prince turned their backs on her.

The imperial physician examined Yan Shi Ting while she absently looked at the empress and the crown prince.

‘Strange...’ the imperial physician said.

Most of the wedding guests were worried something was wrong with Yan Shi Ting and the rest anticipated the imperial physician’s explanation.

‘Imperial physician, hurry and report to the emperor,’ Consort Mu said and feigned concern.

Consort Mu heard news about Yan Shi Ting’s fake pregnancy. But the empress’ calmness made Consort Mu uneasy that the news wasn’t true. Whether Consort Mu could defeat the empress and the crown prince depended on the outcome of the imperial physician’s explanation.

‘Strange?’ the emperor asked.

The imperial physician stood and kowtowed in front of the emperor. ‘Your majesty, Lady Yan is healthy. Your majesty, forgive me but I don’t know why she’s bleeding.’

‘Healthy?’ the emperor asked.

The emperor should have been relieved to hear Yan Shi Ting was healthy but

he felt like the heavens struck him.

‘Your majesty is right,’ the imperial physician said. ‘Lady Yan is healthy.’

The emperor stepped off the platform, grabbed the imperial physician’s collar and spoke softly. ‘Is she pregnant?’

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End of Chapter Thirty-Nine (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Thirty-Nine (Part 2 of 2)

The bulged green veins on the emperor's forehead intimidated the imperial physician.

'Your majesty, I don't know why she's bleeding but... she's not pregnant,' the imperial physician whispered.

The emperor took a deep breath, pushed the imperial physician, turned round and glared at the empress.

Most of the wedding guests didn't understand why the emperor was angry if Yan Shi Ting was healthy.

'Empress, do you know what the punishment for deceiving the emperor is?' the emperor asked coldly.

The empress kowtowed in front of the emperor and cried pitifully. 'Emperor, I was deceived too. I didn't know anything.'

Consort Mu narrowed her eyes. She was shocked and resented the empress. Her heart cursed the empress, 'Kang Thi, your cruelty is impressive! You can sacrifice anyone to protect your son. That's your niece, your blood little sister's daughter but you have no mercy!'

Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin exchanged a secret look then they lowered their heads... they underestimated the empress' cruelty.

Yan Shi Ting widened her eyes, stared at the empress and forgot to cry. What empress was deceived? Lies! The first person who suggested she should fake a pregnancy to force the crown prince to marry her sooner was the empress! The empress and her mother discussed the plan together!

The empress raised her head and accused Yan Shi Ting. 'Shi Ting! Has your aunt mistreated you? Why did you deceive me?'

'Aunt...' Yan Shi Ting said.

'Empress, you and Kang Hua are sisters!' the emperor said.

The empress turned her head to face the skeptical emperor and she continued to cry. 'Emperor, you and I have been married for many years. You know what kind of person I am. I have never deceived you. I was deceived by Kang Hua. I don't know anything. Emperor, please investigate this situation. Xiao Lam, say something.'

The emperor looked at the crown prince. He knew the crown prince was an honest person and he wanted to believe the crown prince's words.

Yan Shi Ting looked at the crown prince. She didn't know what the crown prince would say. Would he save her?

Pei Lam stood still while everyone looked at him and waited for his reply.

Pei Lam lowered his head and thought deeply. Everyone was anxious but his heart was calm. He remembered Yan Shi Ting cried for mercy, a pity it only amused him. She had no relation to him. He was overjoyed she was exposed because he could escape her... but in his lifetime he couldn't escape his cage... unless his words could find an escape for him.

Pei Lam pursed his lips, hid his joy and kowtowed in front of his father. 'Imperial father, truly imperial mother and I don't know anything. We were deceived by aunt's lies.'

Yan Shi Ting looked at the crown prince who calmly lied.

'Since I was young, aunt always wanted me to marry Shi Ting,' the crown prince said. 'I don't love Shi Ting and refused to marry Shi Ting many times... but at a palace banquet Shi Ting put lust herbs into my wine. Then she threatened

me... I felt helpless and agreed to marry her. Yet she's this shameless and faked a pregnancy to ensure I marry her.'

All the wedding guests understood what happened and they looked scornfully at Yan Shi Ting.

Yan Shi Ting didn't care how the wedding guests looked at her. She continued to look at the crown prince who was intimate with her many times. Her sky collapsed and there was only chaos.

Yan Shi Ting heard 'lust herbs, threatened and shameless.' Why did the crown prince lie? Why did the crown prince wanted to push her toward execution? Why did he pour dirty water on her head in front of everyone?

Yan Shi Ting stood and pointed at the crown prince and the empress.

'No!' Yan Shi Ting said. 'You're a liar! Don't believe them!'

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End of Chapter Thirty-Nine (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# part 1



## Chapter Forty (Part 1)

Pei Lam looked coldly at Yan Shi Ting.

‘Yan Shi Ting, look at the evidence and see if you’re not the liar,’ Pei Lam said. He turned his head and looked at his father. ‘Imperial father, she has been sending me threatening letters. If imperial father doesn’t believe me, imperial father can summon the palace maids and eunuchs here. Imperial father, look at her, she’s a shameless woman and deserves to die.’

‘No!’ Yan Shi Ting said. ‘Don’t believe him. He’s lying! I’m not shameless! It was my mother who told me to do this, I didn’t know anything! Big brother crown prince, since you were a little boy you said you loved me! Why are you lying?’

The emperor heard Yan Shi Ting’s pitiful cries. He didn’t understand why an auspicious day turned into a nightmare. He was too angry, his blood flowed chaotically. He stood and spoke heartlessly. ‘Hurry and take her away!’

Yan Shi Ting’s loud cries slowly faded from the ceremonial hall.

The wedding guests were about to leave too but the crown prince suddenly broke the silence.

‘Imperial father, I’m unfilial,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I let imperial father be deceived and shamed the imperial family. Imperial father, I request you take away my



crown prince position. I'm willing to be banished from the palace and do good deeds in remote places to ask the ancestors to forgive me.'

The wedding guests were stunned and the empress was scared to death. But Consort Mu lowered her head and hid her joy.

'What did you say?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, I have shamed you,' Pei Lam said. 'Imperial father, take away my crown prince position.'

The emperor vomited blood.

'Your majesty!' the wedding guests cried out.

The crown prince and Yan Shi Ting's wedding wasn't an auspicious day, it was a tragedy and all the wedding guests quickly retreated from the ceremonial hall.

In the horse carriage Yan Shi Ning hugged Pei Jin. Her heart and hands were cold and trembling. She couldn't stop thinking about the image of Yan Shi Ting being dragged outside the ceremonial hall and Yan Shi Ting's pitiful cries. She was too scared to think about what was going to happen to Yan Shi Ting.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning's cold body tighter and held her hands.

'Pei Jin, what do you think will happen to Yan Shi Ting?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'She would have been executed,' Pei Jin said. 'But now she's trapped in an insane state for life.'

Yan Shi Ning's heart felt remorse.

'Pei Jin, was I too cruel?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, if it's done then you don't need to think about if it's right or wrong,' Pei Jin said. 'It's not your fault alone that she's insane.'

Yan Shi Ning felt colder after she remembered the empress and the crown prince's heartlessness. 'Pei Jin, the palace is a dangerous place.'

'Shi Ning, the palace has always been a dangerous place,' Pei Jin said.

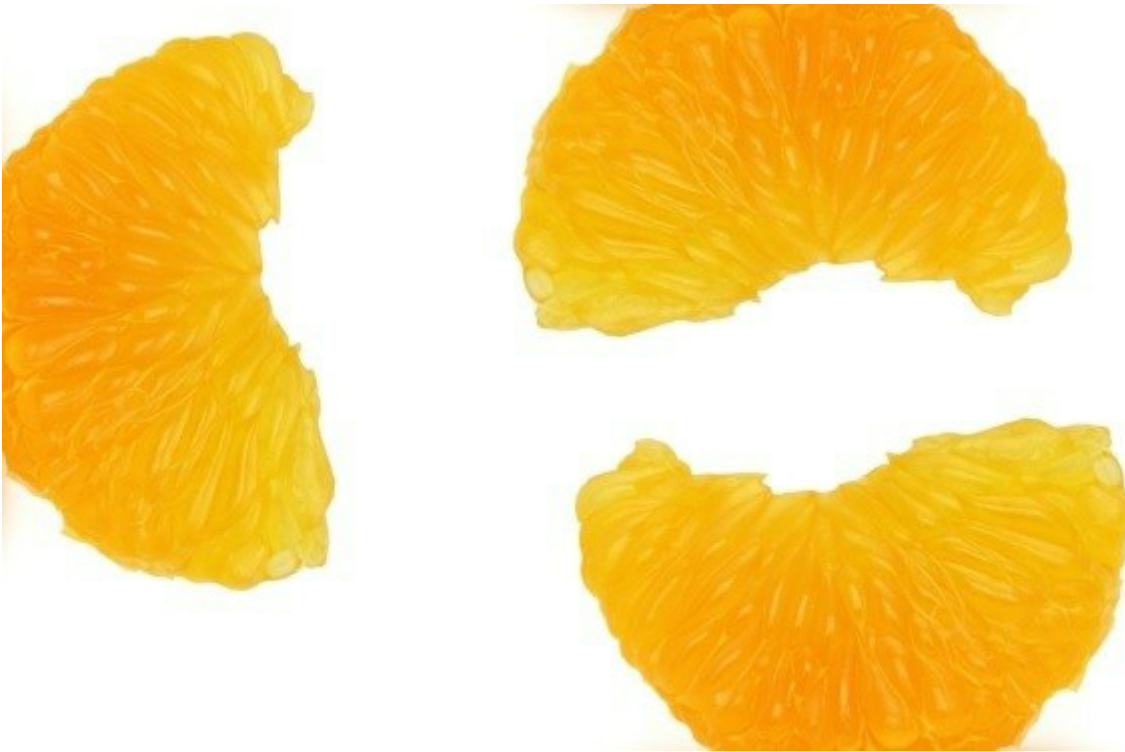
Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and stared out the window. His heart was relieved his Shi Ning wasn't heartless.

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End of Chapter Forty (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Forty (Part 2 of 2)

After escorting Yan Shi Ting to the palace, Princess Kang Hua returned to the Yan Manor.

Yan Jing drank with the guests at the Yan Manor. Neither he nor Princess Kang Hua knew why Yan Shi Ting returned to the Yan Manor, because she was supposed to be the bride at the wedding ceremony in the palace.

Yan Jing also didn't know why Yan Shi Ting was dancing and singing like a fool.

'What happened?' Yan Jing asked.

'Prime Minister Yan, wait at home for the news,' the ceremonial minister said coldly and left.

Yan Jing and Princess Kang Hua sent servants to the palace to find out why Yan Shi Ting was behaving like a fool and the servants returned with bad news.

Princess Kang Hua's life dream shattered, her daughter was insane and her older sister stabbed her heart.

Yan Jing slapped Princess Kang Hua. 'Scum! Look at your good deeds! You dare to let your daughter fake a pregnancy. Do you know what happens if you deceive

the emperor? Death!

‘You dare hit me?’ Princess Kang Hua asked.

‘I want to kill you!’ Yan Jing said. ‘You’ve pulled me into your mess!’

Princess Kang Hua laughed coldly. ‘So what? You die and I die. We’ll die together!’

Yan Jing left Princess Kang Hua’s chamber and she fell into depression.

That evening an elderly lady secretly travelled by horse carriage to visit Princess Kang Hua at the Yan Manor.

Princess Kang Hua was coaxing the insane Yan Shi Ting to sleep when she heard a knock on the door. She opened the door and was scared to see who visited her in the middle of the night.

‘Kang Hua, no one wanted this outcome,’ the elderly lady said. ‘The emperor is ill so he’s not pursuing this matter now. But after he recovers, I fear it’ll be bad for everyone involved. I know you’re not the only one responsible but to protect your family, you need to take all the responsibility. My daughter, I’m sorry it’s been hard for you.’

The elderly lady stood, put a small bottle on a table and left the Yan Manor.

Princess Kang Hua picked up the bottle, sat on a chair and her usual cold arrogance died.

In the palace the emperor was recovering in his chamber. Two years ago the emperor was ill and ingested many medicine to regain his health. No one expected the emperor would fall ill again on his tenth son’s wedding day.

Consort Mu and seventh prince were anxious about the emperor’s health. They didn’t want the emperor to die before announcing the new crown prince.

There were also people in the shadows that didn’t care if the emperor died. If the emperor died then Pei Lam would sit on the throne and seventh prince’s supporters would clash swords with Pei Lam’s supporters. Even if seventh prince stole the throne, the citizens of Dian Kingdom would rebel because the seventh prince wasn’t the true heir. Then both Pei Lam and seventh prince would be eliminated.

While the emperor's health was uncertain the Yan Manor's doors were locked. Princess Kang Hua took care of the insane Yan Shi Ting who continuously laughed and cried. Yan Jing pretended to be ill and didn't attend imperial court meetings at the palace. He knew he would lose his prime minister position but he needed time to think about how to save his life.

At Pei Jin's manor, Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin speculated about the emperor's health in their courtyard.

'Pei Jin, do you think the emperor will recover?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Yes,' Pei Jin said.

'When?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning was anxious what the emperor would do to the people who deceived the emperor.

Pei Jin fed Yan Shi Ning a mandarin segment.

'Soon,' Pei Jin said.

'Isn't the emperor seriously ill?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Imperial father is someone who values image,' Pei Jin said. 'He'll want to kill everyone involved. Even if the empress and tenth brother cut off relations with Princess Kang Hua, imperial father isn't fooled by them. But imperial father can only pretend to cooperate with them because there were too many witnesses that day. He didn't want others to see that an emperor of a kingdom was deceived by his wife and son. He can't swallow his anger but he can feign an illness. It'll give him time to calm down and for everyone's attention to be diverted from the situation. Then he'll punish everyone involved. Shi Ning, you should know imperial father loves to punish other people.'

'What will the emperor do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Imperial father chose to believe the empress and tenth brother in front of everyone,' Pei Jin said. 'It means he'll collect fake evidence to protect them and blame everything on Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting. So the Yan Manor will be in trouble and the empress is safe for now.'

'A pity,' Yan Shi Ning said.

‘There’s no hurry,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Didn’t I say imperial father loves to punish other people? He’ll wait for another opportunity to punish them for their deceit. Shi Ning, soon tenth brother won’t be the crown prince anymore. After that happens the empress will wither.’

‘Pei Jin, do you think the crown prince truly doesn’t want the throne?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

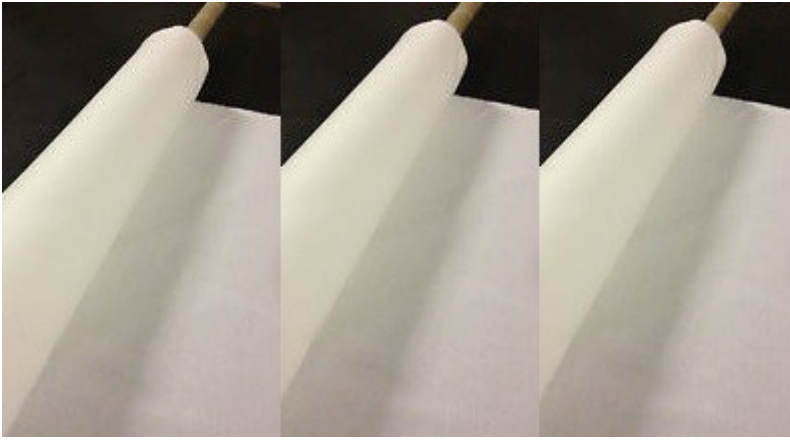
Pei Jin shook his head. ‘Honestly, in the palace tenth brother is someone I don’t understand the most.’

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End of Chapter Forty (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Forty-One



## Chapter Forty-One

The arrival of autumn added to the sombre atmosphere in the palace.

It was a windy morning, Pei Lam stood outside his chamber in thin white clothes.

Outside Pei Lam's chamber there were fresh blood on a wall. The empress had sent someone to kill one of Pei Lam's palace maids who was a spy and a secret lover of seventh prince.

Pei Lam could have saved the dead palace maid. He caught her reporting to seventh prince. She begged him to spare her life while she was being dragged to his courtyard. Why should he save her? She was another ant trapped in a cage who wasn't allowed to see her family and friends outside the palace. The wind blew through his cold body and he smiled, death was an escape for her.

'Xiao Lam, why are you standing here?' the empress asked. 'It's too windy, you'll be ill.'

Pei Lam didn't turn around, he continued to stare at the blood stain on a wall.

'I received news your imperial father is conscious,' the empress said. 'You should go and visit him. Seventh prince had been acting like a filial son by his bedside these past few days.'

'There's nothing good to see there,' Pei Lam said.

'You... this little boy!' the empress said.

'Imperial mother, aren't you tired?' Pei Lam asked.

‘He’s your imperial father!’ the empress said.

Pei Lam turned around and looked sadly at his mother. ‘Imperial mother, put your hand over your heart and ask yourself if you love imperial father.’

‘What are you implying?’ the empress asked.

‘How much you love imperial father is how much I love him,’ Pei Lam said. ‘So I don’t need to see if he’s conscious.’

The empress couldn’t refute her son’s words. She and the emperor were married for more than twenty years but there was no love between them.

‘Imperial mother, don’t waste your energy anymore,’ Pei Lam said.

‘What are you saying?’ the empress asked.

‘Imperial mother, I’m tired,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I don’t want to battle anymore.’

‘You’re insane!’ the empress said.

Pei Lam let the wind blow through his tired heart.

‘That day did you truly requested your imperial father to take away your crown prince position?’ the empress asked.

Pei Lam nodded his head.

‘I’ll never let that happen!’ the empress said. ‘I’ve planned this future for you for many years. What do you mean you’re not going to battle anymore? You must keep battling even if you don’t want to.’

Pei Lam laughed coldly. ‘Imperial mother, don’t force me.’

The empress felt helpless. Was it her son who was standing in front of her? Why did he become a stranger?

‘Imperial mother, it’s windy,’ Pei Lam said. ‘Go back to your chamber.’

Pei Lam glanced at the blood stain on the wall again then he left his courtyard.

The following day news of the emperor was awake and alert spread outside the palace. It was rumored the emperor was deeply moved by the filial seventh prince who never left the emperor’s bedside while the emperor was ill.

At Pei Jin’s manor, Yan Shi Ning’s body felt tired so she napped on the bed.



During the period the emperor was ill, Pei Jin was free. On those free nights he would bathe together with Yan Shi Ning, roll on the bed with her, let her nap and roll on the bed with her until dawn.

One of Pei Jin's guards knocked on the door. Pei Jin opened the door and the guard reported the news about the emperor being awake and alert.

Pei Jin closed the door after the guard left and returned to the bed.

Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes and looked at Pei Jin. 'The emperor's conscious?'

Pei Jin nodded his head. 'It's been three days, of course the emperor needs to be conscious again.'

'I'm waiting for the emperor's edict,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning felt lethargic, she didn't want to move her body but she didn't want Princess Kang Hua to live another peaceful day.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's hand. 'Shi Ning, I want to hear how you feel about your father.'

Yan Shi Ning frowned. She knew Pei Jin was asking her before the emperor's edict if she wanted him to ask the emperor to spare her father's life.

'Although he's my father,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'We've lived together for two years but there's no love between us. I think only losing his prime minister position is too soft on him. He's the reason why my mother was killed. But he's still my father, I don't want him to lose his life.'

'I understand,' Pei Jin said. He hugged Yan Shi Ning. 'Shi Ning, don't worry. I'll ask imperial father to spare his life. Also, Yan Jing isn't someone who idly wait for death. Yan Jing looks like a weak man, but he wouldn't have kept his prime minister position all these years if he wasn't a capable man. That's why I think he'll do everything to save his own life.'

'What will he do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning tighter and he looked outside the window.

As Pei Jin expected, after Yan Jing heard the emperor was awake Yan Jing dressed and rushed to the palace to see the emperor.

The emperor was reading reports when Wang Fu Mu entered the emperor's chamber.

'Your majesty, Prime Minister Yan requests to see your majesty,' Wang Fu Mu said.

'I don't want to see him,' the emperor said.

Wang Fu Mu walked outside the emperor's chamber and Yan Jing begged Wang Fu Mu to persuade the emperor to see him.

Wang Fu Mu sighed and returned to the emperor's chamber. 'Your majesty, Yan Jing said he has something important to discuss with you.'

The emperor laughed coldly. 'He still has something important to discuss? Bring him in here.'

The emperor was amused Yan Jing dared to see him.

Yan Jing wore ordinary clothes, kowtowed in front of the emperor, cried and held up his folded prime minister uniform.

'Your majesty, I'm here to appease some of the injustices your majesty had to endure,' Yan Jing said.

'Appease me?' the emperor asked.

'Yes your majesty,' Yan Jing said. 'I'm not suited to be the prime minister. My wife and my youngest daughter has committed a grave offence against your majesty. That's why I came to see your majesty. I'm willing to resign to appease your majesty.'

'What you're saying is laughable,' the emperor said. 'Don't you know what the punishment is for deceiving an emperor? Death for everyone involved.'

'Your majesty, I was deceived too,' Yan Jing said. 'I didn't know anything about it.'

The emperor laughed coldly. Even if the imperial guards reported to him that Yan Jing wasn't involved in the deception, he was repulsed to see the Yan Jing who was crying and begging in front of him.

'Your majesty, I have another grievance I want to discuss with you,' Yan Jing

said.

The emperor thought Yan Jing didn't understand boundaries.

'Your majesty, I want to divorce Kang Hua,' Yan Jing said.

'Do you think I'll spare you if you divorce her?' the emperor asked.

'Your majesty, there is something you don't know,' Yan Jing said. 'Why I want to divorce Kang Hua has nothing to do with her offence. She had deceived me for many years and committed adultery with another man.'

The emperor looked at Yan Jing with contempt.

'Your majesty, the truth is Yan Shi Ting isn't my daughter,' Yan Jing said. 'Yan Shi Ting is Kang Hua and her older cousin's daughter. Kang Hua deceived me for more than sixteen years. I only found out the truth recently. I didn't think Kang Hua was this despicable. That's why I want to divorce her. Your majesty, please grant my request. If your majesty doesn't believe me, you can send someone to investigate. If you discover I have lied to you then I'm willing to die.'

The emperor laughed at the sight of Yan Jing's hypocritical righteousness. He knew Yan Jing was someone who valued dignity and status. He didn't think there would be a day Yan Jing would cry and beg. Nor did he expect Kang Hua would dare to commit adultery and Yan Shi Ting wasn't Yan Jing's daughter.

'Your majesty, these past few days I've thought this is my retribution,' Yan Jing said. 'That year I abandoned my first wife and daughter and made them suffer... I have no confidence to face the past. Kang Hua is an unreasonable woman, I've suffered under her control for many years. But I can't swallow her adultery and deceit. Your majesty, I beg you to grant my request to let me divorce her. After divorcing her, I'll return to Xuan Qing and guard my first wife's grave until my death.'

Yan Jing acted pitiful in front of the emperor. He wasn't certain the emperor would spare his life and the emperor's silence made him more anxious.

'Yan Jing, I've underestimated you,' the emperor said. 'If what you said is true then you should accept this token from me and return home. Kang Hua has mistreated you like this then she doesn't need to live anymore. But she is the empress' sister and it's not good for this news to be spread outside. I'll let you

deal with the situation discreetly.'

Yan Jing's body shook at the sight of the emperor's token, three long white fabrics. He understood the emperor wanted Kang Hua to die and keep Kang Hua's adultery a secret. If he couldn't expose Kang Hua's adultery then other people would think that it was his decision to kill Kang Hua and the emperor was innocent.

'Do you have anything else important to discuss?' the emperor asked.

'Your majesty, I'll listen to your advice,' Yan Jing said.

The emperor laughed. 'You're a good man. After you have dealt with the situation, I'll let you return to Xuan Qing to be with your first wife.'

Yan Jing couldn't laugh freely as the emperor, he knew he would die before returning to Xuan Qing.

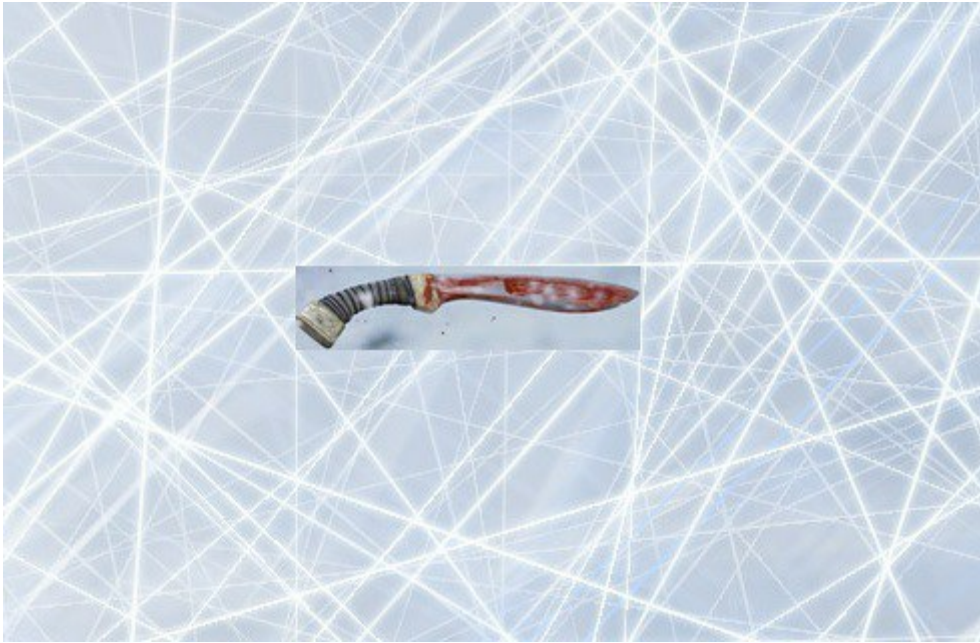
The emperor watched Yan Jing leave hopelessly and his ruthless heart cursed Yan Jing, 'Yan Jing, I did consider sparing your life. But you overestimated your intelligence. Do you dare to oppose my edict?'

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End of Chapter Forty-One

***Related***

# Forty-Two



## Chapter Forty-Two

‘Wang Fu Mu, summon the crown prince,’ the emperor said.

‘Yes your majesty,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

Pei Lam who had not eaten for a few days, lost a lot of weight and walked weakly into the emperor’s chamber.

‘Other people dream of entering this chamber,’ the emperor said. ‘But you’re impressive, you need an invitation before you’re willing to enter this chamber.’

‘Imperial father, your health is important,’ Pei Lam said. ‘It’s not good for you to upset yourself out of bed.’

‘You’re the only one who understands this much,’ the emperor praised.

‘Imperial father, you taught me everything,’ Pei Lam said.

The emperor threw a report at Pei Lam. ‘Don’t learn to act like ninth prince in front of me!’

Pei Lam didn’t avoid the report and it hit his forehead. ‘I envy ninth brother.’

The emperor gritted his teeth.

‘If I was ninth brother,’ Pei Lam said. ‘Then imperial father wouldn’t be angry. Ninth brother didn’t visit your bedside but you didn’t fault him for not being

filial. It doesn't matter if ninth brother isn't sincere or distant, imperial father wouldn't care. That's why I envy ninth brother.'

'I don't care because he is no one in my eyes,' the emperor said.

'Is that so?' Pei Lam asked. 'Then imperial father, you should see me as no one too.'

'Bastard child!' the emperor said.

Pei Lam kowtowed in front of his father. 'Imperial father, please take away my crown prince position.'

Pei Lam hit his forehead on the floor.

The emperor felt his tenth son that he trained for many years had become a stranger.

'Tenth son... this is the third time you have asked me this!' the emperor said.

'Imperial father, I hope there won't be a fourth time,' Pei Lam said.

The emperor knocked over the teapot and cup. 'Tenth son! You're the crown prince I put a lot of energy to train for more than eighteen years! Yet you're asking me to take away your crown prince position. Are you willing to disappoint me?'

'Imperial father, I'm sorry,' Pei Lam said. 'But I don't want the throne and rule over the kingdom. Imperial father, seventh brother is the one who wants it. You should grant his wish. He's devoted and decisive, it makes him more suitable to be emperor than me.'

'Seventh prince?' the emperor asked. 'Devoted? He's a fraud! Who's seventh prince? I know him better than you. He's someone who has the most ulterior motives.'

The emperor struggled to stand. Wang Fu Mu rushed to the emperor's side but the emperor pushed him away.

'Everyone leave!' the emperor ordered.

'Crown prince, take care of the emperor,' Wang Fu Mu said to Pei Lam and left the chamber.

Pei Lam dismissed Wang Fu Mu's advice.

'Although seventh brother has ulterior motives,' Pei Lam said. 'But he hasn't committed any serious offences. But I've shamed imperial father beyond acceptable.'

'So you lied about Yan Shi Ting?' the emperor asked.

Pei Lam didn't deny his father's accusation.

'I didn't think there would be a day tenth son knows how to calmly lie,' the emperor said and laughed coldly. 'It doesn't matter, you shouldn't even dare to think about me taking away your position! I raised you from a child to an adult. I know what you're thinking like I know my own hand. I know your mother forced you to deceive me. Also, seventh prince isn't innocent in this deception either. I know clearly who purposely wanted to expose Yan Shi Ting. Seventh prince and Consort Mu knew about Yan Shi Ting's fake pregnancy long ago and they waited until the wedding to expose Yan Shi Ting. Their black hearts aren't innocent.'

The emperor hit the table. He acted stern with Pei Lam and appeared to favor Pei Zhang. But it wasn't his true heart.

The emperor hated situations out of his control. He knew Pei Lam was soft but Pei Lam was also capable, which was why he chose to train Pei Lam. He thought after he died, Pei Lam would have enough power to sit on the throne. But Pei Lam disappointed him before he died.

The emperor didn't trust Pei Zhang. Pei Zhang was someone who thought too highly of their intelligence, always manipulating situations to benefit themselves and would do anything to gain favor like being stabbed unnecessarily to appear heroic in the eyes of the Dian Kingdom's citizens.

Pei Lam knew Pei Zhang would never satisfy their father's expectations. 'Imperial father, if you're not satisfied with seventh brother, there's still ninth brother.'

The emperor's deadly aura was emitted in all four directions.

'I will never allow ninth prince sit on the throne!' the emperor said.

'Why?' Pei Lam asked.

Pei Lam was curious why his father treated Pei Jin coldly for more than twenty years. He knew Pei Jin was intelligent and treated others fairly. If he could see Pei Jin's strengths then their father could also see Pei Jin's strengths.

'Tenth son, you only need to worry about being a good crown prince!' the emperor said. 'You're my heir, the kingdom will become yours.'

Pei Lam felt helpless to escape his cage. Would he ever even take one step out of his cage? He remembered the dead palace maid and a familiar suffocating sensation wrapped around his body.

Pei Lam stood. 'I don't want it!'

'Pei Lam!' the emperor said.

'Imperial father!' Pei Lam said.

'Do you want me to be angry to death?' the emperor asked.

Pei Lam cried, pulled out a dagger and stabbed his chest. 'Imperial father, don't force me!'

The emperor grabbed Pei Lam's hand. 'Pei Lam, what do you want to do?'

Pei Lam used his strength to stab the dagger deeper. 'Imperial father, I want you to grant my request.'

'Summon an imperial physician!' the emperor cried out.

Wang Fu Mu rushed into the emperor's chamber and realised that day was beautiful. Then he wondered if flowers were blooming in Pei Jin's manor.

Wang Fu Mu hid his thoughts and he acted concern in front of the emperor.

'Your majesty what happened?' Wang Fu Mu asked. 'Ah! Crown prince are you alright?'

That day news about the emperor taking away tenth prince's crown prince position faster than punishing the Yan Manor surprised many people.

The empress almost died to see her son return with blood on his chest. She collapsed on a chair after she read the emperor's edict in her son's hand, her son was no longer the crown prince.

The empress thought her eyes misread the emperor's edict. She had warned



her son not to say any nonsense in front of the emperor. Why would the emperor grant their son's insane request?

'Bastard child!' the empress said. 'How many people do you want to kill?'

Pei Lam found peace amongst the chaos around him. After more than eighteen years in a cage, the door was opened. He could see sunlight, hear the sounds of birds chirping, smell the scent of blossoms and feel warmth enter his cold body. He had never felt as relaxed and happy as he did that day. He smiled like a fool because finally he escaped the cage.

At Pei Jin's manor, Yan Shi Ning couldn't believe the news about the crown prince.

'He's no longer the crown prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head.

'Then who will be the new crown prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'The emperor is keeping the crown prince position vacant,' Pei Jin said.

'Do you think it could be you?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin shook his head. 'It's alright, everything happened according to the plan. But there's something else...'

'What?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, imperial father asked Yan Jing to kill Princess Kang Hua,' Pei Jin said.

'Why would the emperor do that?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'It's hard to see imperial father's true motives,' Pei Jin said. 'Shi Ning, do you want to go to the Yan Manor and give Princess Kang Hua a memorable parting gift? We can let her see clearly whose hands she died under.'

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Of course we need to go. I want to see her die suffering.'

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End of Chapter Forty-Two

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## Forty-Three



### Chapter Forty-Three

Yan Jing spent days at home thinking about how to kill Kang Hua without witnesses.

Princess Kang Hua sat by the window and the sunlight shone on her grey hair strands. In the past she would pluck grey hair, but she knew there was no need to anymore.

Princess Kang Hua heard the door opened, she raised her head and she was surprised to see Yan Jing as much as she was surprised to see flowers blossomed during autumn.

A few nights ago most of the maids and servants ran away from the Yan Manor. Only the older maids and servants stayed because there was nowhere

else for them to serve. So the Yan Manor was quiet enough for a door creak to sound loud.

Yan Jing threw a basket of three long white fabrics in front of Kang Hua. 'It's the emperor's edict, you can kill yourself.'

'Why should I?' Princess Kang Hua asked. 'Didn't the emperor ask you to kill me?'

'You should have killed yourself long ago!' Yan Jing said.

'Why should I die before you?' Princess Kang Hua said.

Yan Jing didn't want to admit he would be killed after Kang Hua died. 'I told you, I'm not going to die with you!'

Princess Kang Hua laughed coldly.

Yan Jing regretted he couldn't kill someone with his own hands. 'If you kill yourself, I'll take care of your bastard child.'

Princess Kang Hua prolonged ingesting the bottle of poison because her heart wasn't at ease about Yan Shi Ting.

Princess Kang Hua didn't get a chance to accept Yan Jing's bribe, an old maid entered the chamber.

'Master, ninth prince's wife is here,' the old maid said.

Yan Jing ignored the resentment in Kang Hua's eyes.

'It's your choice,' Yan Jing said and left the chamber.

Yan Shi Ning was surprised at the quiet and dirty state of the Yan Manor. It was different to the first day she arrived at the Yan Manor two years ago. That day the arrogant Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting waited for her at the entrance of the Yan Manor between the clean two lion statues. Afterward for two years, Princess Kang Hua and Yan Shi Ting always reminded her that she was eating and living in their home.

An old maid escorted Yan Shi Ning to the courtyard and she sat opposite her father.

The old maid poured tea for Yan Shi Ning, she drank it and thought it didn't

taste half as delicious as it did two months ago.

‘Shi Ning, this is a bad time for you to visit,’ Yan Jing said.

Yan Jing didn’t want his daughter to see the poor state of the Yan Manor.

Yan Shi Ning smiled gently at her father. ‘Father, a few days ago my body was unwell and I couldn’t come to visit sooner.’

Yan Jing saw how much his daughter looked like Dung Thi and he sighed sadly. ‘Shi Ning, all these years have you ever resented me?’

Yan Shi Ning was surprised by her father’s question and quietly drank tea.

Yan Jing knew his daughter’s silence meant she did resent him. ‘You have the right to resent me. I’m to blame for everything that has happened.’

Yan Shi Ning didn’t want to hear her father’s regrets. ‘The emperor... did father receive an edict from the emperor?’

Yan Shi Ning knew her question was as rhetorical as her father’s earlier question.

Yan Jing wanted to leave at least one good impression of him in front of his daughter. ‘I don’t know what the emperor will do. But I’ve resigned and the emperor gave his permission for me to return to Xuan Qing.’

Yan Shi Ning felt a little pity to see an old man chased away from the imperial court. ‘That’s good. When I married ninth prince, people told me to live a peaceful life. Father, distancing yourself from the imperial court will let you live a peaceful life. Having power is good but it comes with anxiety.’

Yan Jing lowered his head and drank tea. He didn’t think his daughter could be that kind.

‘I heard little sister’s health is poor,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I came here to visit little sister.’

‘Shi Ning, there’s nothing good for you to see,’ Yan Jing said.

‘Father, she’s still my little sister,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning put the cup on table and she walked to the gardens.

In the gardens Yan Shi Ting was dribbling and smiling at the sky like a fool. She

saw Yan Shi Ning in front of her and grabbed Yan Shi Ning's dress.

'You hurt me!' Yan Shi Ting said.

Yan Shi Ning felt guilty seeing the beautiful Yan Shi Ting became a fool. But Yan Shi Ting's shrieks scared her and she stepped back from Yan Shi Ting.

'Shi Ting, let go of my dress,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ting tore off a sleeve of Yan Shi Ning's dress. The dress was one of the new expensive dresses Lady Su's dressmakers delivered to Pei Jin's manor. She didn't get to pity her dress because Yan Shi Ting was touching the collar of her dress.

Yan Shi Ting thought she found a treasure.

'What a beautiful dress,' Yan Shi Ting said.

Yan Shi Ning felt relieved Yan Shi Ting wasn't going to tear the other sleeve off her dress.

Suddenly Yan Shi Ting grabbed Yan Shi Ning's collar. 'This is my dress! Take off my dress! You're a bad person! You stole my dress!'

Yan Shi Ning pushed Yan Shi Ting away from her and took many steps back.

Yan Shi Ting fell on the ground and cried loudly. 'You're a bad person! You want to hurt me! Why do you want to hurt me? Why? I'm the crown prince's wife!'

Yan Shi Ning heard Yan Shi Ting was insane but she didn't know how insane until she witnessed Yan Shi Ting's crying one moment and laughing the next moment.

'Shi Ting, I'm truly sorry,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'I didn't think I'll cause you to become like this. But don't worry, after she dies, I'll take good care of you.'

Yan Shi Ning left Yan Shi Ting in the gardens to look for her mother's killer.

After Yan Shi Ning left, Pei Lam stepped out from the shadows. He watched Yan Shi Ting sit on the ground while tearing petals and leaves off flowers.

'Big brother crown prince, I love big brother,' Yan Shi Ting said to the flower. 'Big brother, do you love me?'

‘Um,’ Pei Lam said.

‘Then in the future will you marry me?’ Yan Shi Ting asked the flower.

‘Um,’ Pei Lam said.

Pei Lam couldn’t believe the Yan Shi Ting in front of him was the same young girl with bright eyes in his memories. He thought those early childhood years were beautiful.

Yan Shi Ting felt that someone was standing behind her. She turned around and smiled. She stood and grabbed Pei Lam’s sleeve. ‘Big brother crown prince, you’re here. I knew big brother would come.’

Pei Lam let Yan Shi Ting wrap her arms around his neck.

Yan Shi Ting felt happy. ‘Big brother crown prince, do you know long I waited for big brother? I thought big brother wouldn’t come. Big brother crown prince, why isn’t big brother talking? Is it because you don’t love Shi Ting? Big brother crown prince, you can’t hate Shi Ting. Shi Ting will be the crown prince’s wife.’

Yan Shi Ting remembered something and began to take off her dress. ‘Big brother crown prince, today my dress is easy to take off. Big brother come behind me. I know big brother loves that position the most-’

Pei Lam hands squeezed Yan Shi Ting’s neck.

Yan Shi Ting tried to push away the hands around her neck, but the hands were too strong. She gasped for air and felt like she was slowly choking.

A while later Yan Shi Ting stopped struggling. She silently cried, suspicions were gone and everything beautiful died. Why was the crown prince crying? She wanted to wipe his tears but she had no strength left.

Pei Lam’s hands let go of Yan Shi Ting’s neck and he silently cried.

‘For you dying is better than living,’ Pei Lam said. ‘If you die, you can escape.’

Afterward the body of one of the imperial city’s beauties fell into cold water. But Yan Shi Ting’s eyes were wide opened as though she was asking, ‘Big brother crown prince, why did you kill me?’

Pei Lam stood in the gardens, pulled out an old letter and teared it to pieces,

‘Big brother crown prince, I’ll open the small western door of the Yan Manor. If big brother wants me, big brother can come there to find me. I’m waiting for you.’

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End of Chapter Forty-Three

***Related***

# Forty-Four



## Chapter Forty-Four

Yan Shi Ning entered Princess Kang Hua's chamber.

The chamber was quiet and dusty. Princess Kang Hua glanced at Yan Shi Ning and Princess Kang Hua laughed coldly. She couldn't believe Princess Kang Hua wanted to enter a grave arrogantly.

'Why did you come here?' Princess Kang Hua asked coldly.

'I came to see how you'll die,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Princess Kang Hua pursed her lips.

Yan Shi Ning noticed the white fabrics on the table. 'The past few days I thought about how you're feeling. Do you feel like you've lost everything?'

Princess Kang Hua heard Yan Shi Ning's condescending tone. She turned to look at Yan Shi Ning who no longer acted gentle instead looked down on her. The way Yan Shi Ning smiled coldly was the same way Yan Shi Ning smiled at her on Yan Shi Ting's wedding day.

Princess Kang Hua stood straight. 'It was you!'

'What do you think?' Yan Shi Ning asked.



‘Why?’ Princess Kang Hua asked.

‘Why?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Shouldn’t I be the one asking you why?’

Princess Kang Hua took a step back.

‘Why did you poison my mother to death?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘My mother never fought with you. Why did you kill my mother?’

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t control the pain in her heart. She couldn’t kill Princess Kang Hua and couldn’t stop her tears from falling.

‘She deserved to die!’ Princess Kang Hua said. ‘Who is she to dare to compete with me? She’s only scum.’

‘You’re scum!’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘You stole someone else’s husband. You committed adultery, you’re deceitful and shameless!’

‘She deserves to die!’ Princess Kang Hua said. ‘She’s scum. Who is she to deserve him? I’m a princess, why do I need to lower myself under a scum and be a second wife? It’s an insult to me! Scum like her deserves to die! I should have killed her earlier! Each day she lives is another day of insults to me! You should die too! You and your mother are scums and deserve to die!’

Yan Shi Ning slapped Princess Kang Hua’s cheek.

‘You’re the one who deserves to die!’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘You’re a woman who has a cruel snake heart!’

Princess Kang Hua was startled by Yan Shi Ning’s slap.

‘This is your retribution,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Your big sister betrayed you and your only daughter is insane. The husband you stole is the man who gave you these white fabrics. You’ve lost everything and left with two empty hands. Kang Hua, do you know how I wanted you to die after I found out you killed my mother? Didn’t you want your daughter to be the crown prince’s wife? I stopped your daughter from marrying the crown prince. Didn’t you want to steal my mother’s husband? I made certain he turned his back on you. Didn’t you always want to maintain your arrogance? I kicked you onto dirt. I won’t let you die peacefully. I want you to lose everything you cared about. I want you to die suffering. I want you and everyone you care about to pay for killing my mother.’

‘You’re dreaming-’ Princess Kang Hua said.

‘Second mistress fell into the well!’ an old maid cried out from outside the chamber. ‘Madam, second mistress died!’

Princess Kang Hua pushed Yan Shi Ning away and ran outside.

‘What did you say?’ Princess Kang Hua asked.

‘Madam, second mistress died,’ the old maid said.

‘Where is she?’ Princess Kang Hua asked in a shaky voice.

‘Second mistress... she’s in the gardens...’ the old maid stuttered.

Princess Kang Hua ran to the gardens and a shocked Yan Shi Ning followed Princess Kang Hua.

At the well, the old maids and servants were finding a way to pull Yan Shi Ting out of the well.

Yan Jing stood away from the well, he didn’t know if he was happy or sad.

Princess Kang Hua pushed the old maids and servants out of the way. She looked down at her daughter who died with her eyes opened and she screamed loudly.

‘Shi Ting!’ Princess Kang Hua cried out. ‘My daughter! Who did this? Who?’

Princess Kang Hua looked at everyone around the well.

‘Madam, I don’t know who,’ Yan Shi Ting’s personal maid said. ‘Earlier ninth prince’s wife came to the gardens to see second mistress. Then I went to brew medicine for second mistress in the kitchen. When I came back here, I didn’t see second mistress anywhere. So I walked around the gardens and found second mistress dead in the well. I don’t know who killed second mistress.’

Princess Kang Hua turned around and she wanted to kill Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning stepped back away from Princess Kang Hua.

‘I didn’t kill her,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘She’s like this and you still didn’t spare her!’ Princess Kang Hua said. ‘I want to kill you!’

Princess Kang Hua pulled out a dagger and stabbed Yan Shi Ning's chest.

Xiao Zai jumped out of the shadows and pushed Princess Kang Hua away from Yan Shi Ning.

'Shi Ning!' Yan Jing cried out.

Princess Kang Hua stood up from the ground. 'I should have killed you sooner! That year I killed your mother, I should have killed you too! You're a cruel demoness! I want to kill you!'

Yan Jing thought he misheard Kang Hua's words. What that year killed your mother? What did that mean?

Yan Shi Ning's chest hurt and her face whitened. 'Didn't you try to kill me? You used Fu Gui to poison me.'

'Fu Gui?' Princess Kang Hua asked and looked confusedly at Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning was confused why Princess Kang Hua didn't know what Fu Gui was.

'Shi Ning, how did your mother die?' Yan Jing asked.

'How my mother died?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'She ordered widow Li to poison my mother to death!'

'Widow Li?' Yan Jing asked. 'How is that possible?'

Yan Shi Ning laughed coldly. 'Father, didn't you know you've been living with a cruel woman for many years? Even now, do you truly don't know you married a black hearted woman?'

Yan Jing was saddened by his daughter's look of hatred toward him.

Yan Shi Ning cried. 'I have a good father. My father let my innocent mother be killed. My mother was killed by you and that woman!'

'That's why she wants to take revenge on her father and me,' Princess Kang Hua said and she laughed bitterly. 'Yan Jing, did you hear your daughter say she hates you? Yan Jing, you're in your position today because of your good daughter. Everything was her plan. She sent the letters, she's the one that ruined our marriage and she's the one that killed Shi Ting! Yan Jing open your

eyes and look at your good daughter. She destroyed everything you have.'

Yan Jing heard everything and his heart froze. He didn't want to believe his daughter did everything Kang Hua said. In that moment he felt like he lived his whole life in vain and everything bad that happened was his retribution.

'Shi Ning, go home,' Yan Jing said and looked at his daughter for the last time.

A lot of blood flowed out of Yan Shi Ning's stab wound. She felt her body weakened, the sky darkened and she fainted.

'Mistress!' Xiao Zai cried out.

Xiao Zai ran to Yan Shi Ning and carried her to the horse carriage. He knew after they returned to the manor, ninth prince was going to skin him alive.

After Yan Shi Ning left the Yan Manor, Yan Jing ordered the servants to bound and lock Kang Hua in her chamber.

Later that night Yan Jing gathered all the old maids and servants. He poured wine for everyone until they were all drunk and collapsed on the table. Then he used the three white fabrics to make a noose and suspend it from the ceiling of Kang Hua's chamber.

Yan Jing wrapped the noose around the bound Kang Hua's neck. She screamed but he stabbed her heart with a dagger and she died.

Yan Jing picked up the small bottle on Kang Hua's table, lit the Yan Manor on fire and ingested everything in the small bottle.

Before Yan Jing died, he remembered the ten years he studied and Dung Thi was by his side. She loved him, cooked for him and supported him. He wanted to give her everything in the world, money, status and for everyone to envy her. He studied day and night and thirsted for success. Finally he passed the imperial examination, earned money and status. But afterward his fate changed for the worst, he lost her... he watched the fire burn everything and everyone inside the Yan Manor and he laughed. Everything that happened in the past became a dream. If that was so then he accepted all his wasted energy to pursue everything was pointless.

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End of Chapter Forty-Four

***Related***

## Forty-Five



### Chapter Forty-Five

Xiao Zai carried Yan Shi Ning to Bei Dou's chamber.

Bei Dou was scared to death to see the unconscious Yan Shi Ning.

Xiao Zai put Yan Shi Ning on the bed and he explained to Bei Dou what happened at the Yan Manor.

'Go and run to the palace to tell Pei Jin,' Bei Dou said.

Xiao Zai rushed out of Bei Dou's chamber to the horse carriage.

Bei Dou was scared how Pei Jin would react to the news about Yan Shi Ning being injured.

Bei Dou washed his hands and was prepared to examine and clean Yan Shi

Ning's wound. But he looked at the wound on her chest then he looked out the window. He saw a maid and summoned the maid.

'You come here,' Bei Dou said.

Bei Dou vaguely remembered the maid. He had seen her often in the gardens. She calmly helped examine Yan Shi Ning even though Yan Shi Ning's chest was bleeding.

'Have you washed your hands properly?' Bei Dou asked.

'Yes,' Xiao Tu said.

'Firstly, take off ninth prince's wife's dress,' Bei Dou said.

'The dress is stuck to mistress' chest,' Xiao Tu said.

'Use scissors to cut off her dress,' Bei Dou said.

'Yes,' Xiao Tu said.

'Use the bowl of water and cloth I prepared to clean her wound,' Bei Dou said.

'Yes,' Xiao Tu said.

'What colour is the blood?' Bei Dou said.

Xiao Tu passed a piece of Yan Shi Ning's dress to Bei Dou.

'Good, she's not poisoned,' Bei Dou said. 'You can bandage her wound.'

'Done,' Xiao Tu said.

Bei Dou dared to turn around and he checked Yan Shi Ning's condition.

Bei Dou was scared to see how much blood Yan Shi Ning lost. He was surprised the maid was calm while seeing that much blood.

Bei Dou decided the maid was suitable to help him examine people in the Yan Manor when they were ill or injured. After he was certain Yan Shi Ning's condition was stable, he and the maid walked outside his chamber.

Bei Dou looked at the maid who was staring at him strangely. She stepped closer to him and vomited on his clothes.

'Gentleman Bei, the sight of blood makes me queasy,' Xiao Tu said and fainted.

Bei Dou looked at his dirty clothes and the 'calm' maid who fainted on his chest, he realised he overestimated her calmness.

Inside the horse carriage, Xiao Zai gripped Xiao Hui's collar and Xiao Zai cried pitifully.

'I'll be dead soon,' Xiao Zai said. 'Ninth prince is going to skin me. What do I do?'

Xiao Hui endured Xiao Zai's tears that were dirtying his clothes.

'Don't worry,' Xiao Hui said.

'Will you help me beg ninth prince to be merciful toward me?' Xiao Zai asked.

'No,' Xiao Hui said. 'I promise I'll burn joss sticks on the anniversary of your death.'

'Thank you,' Xiao Zai said. 'You need to keep the joss sticks for your grave too.'

Early that morning Pei Jin and Pei Zhang was summoned to the palace. Pei Jin was relieved the imperial court meeting finally ended after two shichen hours. But Pei Zhang asked to escort Pei Jin to the palace gates.

Pei Jin thought it was true if someone received good news, their body would emit a happy aura like Pei Zhang. Although the crown prince position was vacant, Pei Zhang acted like 'if father isn't going to pick me then who can me pick?'

'Ninth brother, I didn't think there would be a day tenth brother would be in this unfortunate position,' Pei Zhang said.

Pei Jin smiled politely and he didn't offer his opinion.

Pei Zhang purposely baited Pei Jin. He gave Pei Jin an opportunity to gain his favor. But Pei Jin insulted him by not taking the bait. 'Last time I looked for ninth brother to drink wine, ninth brother declined. Ninth brother, are you free to drink today?'

'I'm free today but I'm scared I'll waste seventh brother's free time,' Pei Jin politely declined.

Pei Zhang frowned. Pei Jin dared to reject him again, but at least Pei Jin



appeared more regretful than last time. He didn't understand why an unfavored prince refused to support any sides. He wondered if Pei Jin truly wanted to be a carefree gentle ninth prince.

Pei Zhang smiled and forgave Pei Jin's rejection. He remembered one of Pei Jin's servants accidentally revealed the news about Yan Shi Ting's fake pregnancy and it helped him oppose the empress and the Yan Manor. 'Ninth brother, thank you.'

Pei Jin acted confused. 'Seventh brother, why are you thanking me?'

Pei Zhang looked at Pei Jin's confused face and he felt happier. He decided he would find more ways to make good use of Fu Qing.

Pei Jin watched Pei Zhang walked away confidently then Pei Jin walked outside the palace gates.

Outside the palace gates Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai were waiting for Pei Jin.

'Ninth prince, finally you're outside the palace,' Xiao Zai said and cried.

'What happened?' Pei Jin asked and his intuition warned him it was bad news.

'Ninth prince, your wife is injured,' Xiao Hui said.

Nearby Pei Zhang was surprised to see the usually calm Pei Jin was panicking and leapt into the horse carriage... all these years it was the second time he had seen Pei Jin panicked. The first time was after Consort Chen died. He realised Pei Jin was sentimental about women. An image of the gentle Yan Shi Ning entered his head and he signalled one of his guards. 'Go and find out what happened to ninth prince's wife.'

Pei Jin rushed home and he looked for Bei Dou.

Bei Dou had changed into clean clothes, carried Yan Shi Ning to hers and Pei Jin's chamber then he waited for Pei Jin in the courtyard.

'How is my wife?' Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou pushed Pei Jin's hand away from his collar. 'She couldn't die.'

Pei Jin thought Bei Dou knew how to use a sharp tongue to choke a person speechless. But he knew it meant Yan Shi Ning wasn't in a serious condition.

Pei Jin ran to the bed and Bei Dou followed Pei Jin.

‘Where is she injured?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou hesitated to reply.

‘Where?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Chest,’ Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin grabbed Bei Dou’s collar again. ‘You bandaged her wound?’

Bei Dou raised his innocent hands. ‘It wasn’t me.’

Pei Jin let go of Bei Dou’s collar. ‘I knew you wouldn’t dare.’

Bei Dou ignored Pei Jin’s mockery of him because he knew Pei Jin’s heart was hurting.

Pei Jin sat on the bed and touched Yan Shi Ning’s forehead.

‘Is it serious?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou frowned. ‘If the wound was lower by a hand, it would have been serious.’

Pei Jin was confused. What lower? Below the chest was the stomach. Stomach? He didn’t understand why a stomach injury would be more serious than a chest injury.

Bei Dou saw Pei Jin’s confusion turned into joy.

‘You guessed right,’ Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin’s eyes shone brightly.

Yan Shi Ning dreamt about when she was a six-year-old girl. In a garden planted for young children there were many young trees that blossomed every ten years and bear fruits twelve years later. She asked the elders to let her take one young trees home to plant it in her mother’s garden.

The elders advised the six-year-old Yan Shi Ning many things. ‘Xiao Ning, you need to take good care of this young tree. The fate of the young tree will grow up like its master’s fate.’

Yan Shi Ning listened to the elders’ advice. Each day she would run to her

mother's garden and water her young tree. But one day she didn't see her young tree in her mother's garden, Pei Jin's goat ate her precious young tree!

In Yan Shi Ning's dream, her forgotten young tree grew tall and strong after twelve years. She smiled, climbed the tree and picked fruits. Then the ground disappeared and she fell.

In Yan Shi Ning's unconscious state she cursed Pei Jin, 'MF Pei Jin, you dug up my precious young tree again!'

Yan Shi Ning felt like a sharp dagger stabbed her chest. Her chest ached and she touched her chest.

'Don't touch!' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes and saw Pei Jin was sitting on the bed next to her. The sunlight shone through the window and warmed the room. But his face looked a little anxious. Suddenly she remembered her chest injury and her head ached.

Yan Shi Ning's head ached because she remembered Pei Jin's instructions before he travelled to the palace.

'I have a guard at the Yan Manor,' Pei Jin said. 'If Yan Jing prepares to kill Princess Kang Hua, the guard will send news to our home. Then we'll go to the Yan Manor together. Shi Ning, you can't go on your own. Princess Kang Hua's in a fragile state since Yan Shi Ting became insane. No one can predict what can happen. Shi Ning, if you want to go to the Yan Manor, you have to go with me. Understand?'

At that time she nodded her head and promised Pei Jin. But Pei Jin's guard sent news about Yan Jing preparing to kill Princess Kang Hua and she couldn't wait for Pei Jin to return from the palace.

Yan Shi Ning was worried Princess Kang Hua would die before Pei Jin returned. So Yan Shi Ning decided to bring Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai with her to the Yan Manor. But Xiao Hui wasn't at the manor and only Xiao Zai followed her to the Yan Manor.

'Shi Ning, how should I punish you?' Pei Jin asked.

‘I’m injured,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘If you listened to me then you wouldn’t be injured,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning saw Pei Jin was being stern with her. She quietly pulled the blanket up to hide her face but he stopped her.

‘Pei Jin, what do you want to do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Let me see your wound,’ Pei Jin said.

Earlier Bei Dou told Pei Jin if the dagger stabbed a little deeper, it would have stabbed Yan Shi Ning’s heart. Luckily Xiao Zai was there to push Princess Kang Hua away before the dagger stabbed her chest deeper.

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning’s chest wound and his heart ached. He wanted to touch her wound but he was scared it’ll hurt her.

‘Does it hurt?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘It hurts a lot!’ Yan Shi Ning lied.

After Yan Shi Ning drank the medicine Bei Dou brewed for her, she didn’t feel any chest pain. But she needed to act pitiful in front of Pei Jin so he wouldn’t think of a primitive way to punish her.

Pei Jin turned his head to the door. ‘Bei Dou! Didn’t you say you gave my wife medicine to numb the pain?’

Outside the chamber, Bei Dou was suspicious why the medicine didn’t work.

‘Pei Jin... honestly it only hurts a little,’ Yan Shi Ning confessed.

Pei Jin realised Yan Shi Ning fooled him. ‘Wife, you’re improving each day. Not only did you not listen to me but you learned how to fool me. Wife, wait and see how I’ll punish you.’

Yan Shi Ning was thinking of what to say when Pei Jin hugged her gently.

Pei Jin was overjoyed and whispered in Yan Shi Ning’s ear. ‘Shi Ning, we conceived a child together.’

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End of Chapter Forty-Five

***Related***

## Forty-Six



### Chapter Forty-Six

Yan Shi Ning stared at her stomach.

Yan Shi Ning rubbed her stomach like a fool. 'I'm pregnant?'

'It explains why you've been tired lately,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning thought she couldn't be pregnant that soon. She wondered if hers and Pei Jin's child was inside her.

Yan Shi Ning's stomach didn't look like it changed but she felt a strange change. 'Pei Jin, should I give birth to this child?'

'What?' Pei Jin asked.

'Princess Kang Hua and the empress used Fu Gui to poison me because they hoped I would die pregnant... wait, something's not right. Pei Jin, I remembered something. Pei Jin, when I was at the Yan Manor I asked Princess Kang Hua about it and her reaction was strange...'

'Shi Ning, are you saying that someone else poisoned you?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head.

‘Who?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Yan Shi Ting gave me the incense sticks,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘She said the empress gave them to her. It can’t be the empress. Princess Kang Hua and the empress are fishes in the same net. If the empress wanted to kill me then the empress wouldn’t hide it from Princess Kang Hua.’

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t believe there was someone else behind Princess Kang Hua and the empress who wanted to kill her.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hand. But his eyes saddened, he thought of who else would want to kill her.

Pei Jin thought if Princess Kang Hua didn’t try to kill Yan Shi Ning then it could also be possible the empress didn’t kill Consort Chen. But Bei Dou said Fu Gui was rare and hard to make so an ordinary person couldn’t possess Fu Gui.

Pei Jin’s heart constricted, he had followed the wrong suspect for a long time. He wondered who could have such a cruel heart to make him suffer for many years. The cruel hearted person he thought of was his father and his back turned cold.

‘Pei Jin, what are you thinking?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I think perhaps it’s imperial father who killed Consort Chen and who also tried to kill you,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning’s heart ached for Pei Jin. She had never seen him that sad before. She knew the emperor was cold toward Pei Jin. But if the emperor was the culprit then the emperor wanted Pei Jin to lose his wife and child. It meant the emperor held a big grudge against Pei Jin.

Pei Jin didn’t fight for or requested anything from the emperor. Yan Shi Ning thought if it truly was the emperor then it would be no different from the emperor using a dagger to cut Pei Jin into small pieces. She didn’t care about her chest injury, she sat up, hugged Pei Jin and kissed his lips.

‘Pei Jin, it’s alright,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘You don’t need to think about it anymore. You still have your little lion and a little lion cub here with you.’

Pei Jin felt like he was falling into an abyss. But Yan Shi Ning hugged him, kissed him and saved him from the abyss. He buried his head on her neck and greedily stole her warmth.

Pei Jin's father had been cold toward him since he was a child and in the palace only Consort Chen gave him a little warmth. Consort Chen's death when he was a twelve-year-old made him feel the world around him darkened. Then his teacher took him out of the palace to Xuan Qing. In his darkest period a little girl entered his dark tunnelled heart and into his world.

Pei Jin remembered clearly the first time he saw Yan Shi Ning. Her hair was messy, her dark eyes, her messy dress and her chubby arms. She clearly was a naive little girl but acted wise and tough. After she knew he was teasing her, her face puffed like a lion's mane and she widened her eyes like she wanted to jump onto him to bite him. In that moment he thought she looked like a provoked little lion... his little lion. It didn't matter if she was in Xuan Qing or in the imperial city acting like a gentle lady, she was still his little lion. No one forced him to love his little lion, his heart willingly loved her deeply.

At the beginning Pei Jin thought it was amusing to tease the naive Yan Shi Ning. She was the only one in his life who laughed and ignored him at will. He didn't know why later his heart slowly changed. After the emperor betrothed him to Lady Yewu, he didn't feel anything. But after Lady Yewu died, his heart felt relieved and missed the little lion who was living in Xuan Qing. He thought his little lion would have matured.

Pei Jin wasn't certain if he volunteered to go help prevent serious flooding in Xuan Qing to avoid the palace battles or if he only wanted to see Yan Shi Ning. He could have stayed at a villa in Xuan Qing but he ran to his teacher's house that was next to Yan Shi Ning's house and during the nights he would wake her up and force her to pour tea for him. He thought it would be good if she was always by his side even if she gritted her teeth and glared at him, he was willing for her to become an adult then he would marry her.

Pei Jin first thought about marrying Yan Shi Ning six years ago, but he buried that thought. He was a prince and his father wouldn't allow him to marry her as his official wife. He didn't want her to lower herself and be his second wife and her personality didn't suit the palace.



After Pei Jin travelled to Southern Jiang, he found out Yan Shi Ning's mother died and she moved to the Yan Manor. He sent some of his guards to secretly gather news about Yan Shi Ning at the Yan Manor. His guards reported to him that Yan Shi Ning's status in her family prevented her from finding a suitable husband and it made him happy. He planned after he finished his duties in Southern Jiang he would return to the imperial city and marry her. But before he finished his duties he received news about the crown prince and Yan Shi Ting and he immediately ran back to the imperial city... he wasn't going to allow seventh brother to marry his little lion as a concubine.

Pei Jin knew Yan Shi Ning only showed her real self to him like how he only took off his mask in front of her.

Pei Jin nibbled Yan Shi Ning's earlobe and whispered in her ear. 'Wife, it's the middle of the day but you miss your husband this much? Perhaps you want to do it with your husband.'

Yan Shi Ning wanted to console Pei Jin but after he whispered nonsense in her ear, she pushed him away from her. 'MF Pei Jin!'

Yan Shi Ning forgot about her chest injury, overexerted herself and her face whitened.

'Shi Ning, are you alright?' Pei Jin asked.

'My chest hurts,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'My stomach hurts. My whole body hurts.'

Pei Jin ran outside to call Bei Dou.

Bei Dou gave Pei Jin a bottle of pain relief cream. Pei Jin ran to the bed and gently rubbed the cream on Yan Shi Ning's chest wound. After she fell asleep, Pei Jin ran outside to ask Bei Dou about her pregnancy.

'When will my wife's chest wound heal?' Pei Jin asked.

'Two months,' Bei Dou said.

'Do I need to refrain from doing it with my wife while she's pregnant?' Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou nodded his head.

'When is it safe for me to do it with my wife?' Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou blushed but he realised it was a good opportunity to take a little revenge on Pei Jin. It was Pei Jin's fault for turning into someone with a missing brain.

'Fu Qing is a good place,' Bei Dou provoked. 'After your wife gives birth, her body needs time to recover. You can either choose to endure for a year or...'

Pei Jin angrily strode back to the bed while Bei Dou smiled... indeed ten years wasn't too late for a gentleman to take revenge. Bei Dou knew it was safe for a husband and wife to do it together after the first three months of pregnancy but he wasn't a fool to tell Pei Jin the truth.

Bei Dou was about to return to his chamber, but he bumped into the 'calm' maid.

'Gentleman Bei, have you been to Fu Qing?' Xiao Tu asked.

'No!' Bei Dou lied.

'Then why did you say Fu Qing is a good place?' Xiao Tu asked.

'I heard it was a good place,' Bei Dou lied.

Xiao Tu nodded her head. 'I knew Gentleman Bei wouldn't go to a place like Fu Qing.'

'That's right,' Bei Dou said.

Bei Dou wouldn't have gone to Fu Qing if Pei Jin didn't force him.

'I heard the food there is expensive,' Xiao Tu said. 'Gentleman Bei is a frugal person. Of course Gentleman Bei wouldn't go there to eat expensive food.'

'How am I frugal?' Bei Dou asked.

Xiao Tu's hand gestured at Bei Dou's clothes. 'Gentleman Bei, you wear the same black clothes every day throughout a year.'

Bei Dou was speechless. Who said he wore the same black clothes? He bought new clothes every year except it was the same colour and design.

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Short Side Story Two

Gentleman Su: Is that you Bei Dou? Why are you free to visit me today?

Bei Dou looked at the ceiling.

Gentleman Su: Did you come to buy the same black clothes?

Bei Dou: I... want to choose a different colour and design.

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End of Chapter Forty-Six

***Related***

**Forty-Seven**



## Chapter Forty-Seven

After a nap, Yan Shi Ning thought about the emperor's motives.

'Pei Jin, I'm not certain the emperor poisoned me,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Why?' Pei Jin asked.

'I don't know what the emperor's motives to poison me are,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin's head and heart were muddled earlier. Yan Shi Ning's logic reminded him that he forgot to think about his father's motives for poisoning Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's eyes shone at each other.

'Shi Ning, do you think it's that person too?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head. 'Perhaps that person used Princess Kang Hua in hope of using her to kill me. Besides, Princess Kang Hua didn't need to wait, she could have poisoned me the moment I arrived in the imperial city.'

'In the past Bei Dou and I had the same thought as you,' Pei Jin said. 'Then we thought perhaps she wanted you to die outside the Yan Manor to deflect suspicions... but looking at the past now, perhaps that assumption is wrong.'

Yan Shi Ning's chest hurt while remembering how viciously Princess Kang Hua

stabbed her and she wondered if Princess Kang Hua was still alive.

‘That’s right,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If Princess Kang Hua wanted to kill me, she would have killed me at the Yan Manor.’

‘Earlier like you,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I thought it was imperial father. But now I think it’s that person, she has a motive to kill you.’

An image of the kind Consort Mu appeared in Yan Shi Ning’s head and she sighed. ‘Glancing at her, she seems like a kind person.’

‘Shi Ning, do you remember what I told you about Consort Chen?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning remembered Pei Jin confided in her about how Consort Chen was poisoned by Fu Gui and she nodded her head.

‘At that time I suspected there was something wrong about the fragrance of the incense sticks,’ Pei Jin said. ‘So I hid them but later they disappeared. Thinking about it now, I think she found out I hid them and sent someone to retrieve the incense sticks. I think Consort Mu knows that I know the incense sticks were poisoned.’

‘That’s why I think she wants borrow a dagger to kill me,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘She and seventh brother used Yan Shi Ting’s fake pregnancy to oppose the empress and the crown prince,’ Pei Jin said. ‘They would do anything to eliminate anyone who poses a threat to them big or small.’

‘Pei Jin, what should we do now?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin laid his hands on Yan Shi Ning’s stomach. ‘I need to ask someone to be certain who poisoned you. After I’ve confirmed it then I can plan what to do next.’

‘Who do you need to ask?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘The empress,’ Pei Jin said.

‘The empress?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘If the empress denies it then it’s possible Consort Mu is the culprit. But if the empress did it, would she admit it to you?’

‘I have a way to make the empress tell me the truth,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Pei Jin, are you hiding anything else in your stomach?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hands and put them below his stomach. ‘Inside your husband’s stomach isn’t hiding anything. But your husband is hiding something here.’

Yan Shi Ning’s face flushed red. She pulled his hand to her mouth and bit hard. ‘Even if you’re about to die, you wouldn’t know how to be serious.’

Yan Shi Ning didn’t think Consort Mu would be so cruel only to ensure Pei Jin didn’t have a son. She was worried if other people found out she was pregnant then something bad could happen to their child.

‘I think it’s not the right time for our child to be here,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning, do you know what Bei Dou gave me after we got married?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘A remedy to prevent pregnancy,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Why didn’t you use it?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘If I can’t protect my wife and child,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Then I wasted more than twenty years of living.’

Yan Shi Ning didn’t know why Pei Jin’s stern tone warmed her heart.

‘Pei Jin, do you want to be the emperor?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Yan Shi Ning, I want to see how you’ll look as an empress and how you’ll fool the world thinking you’re a gentle empress,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was a capable man. If he truly wanted to be emperor then she would support him. But she didn’t expect him to be amused at the thought of them being the emperor and the empress.

‘Then I don’t want to be the empress,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If I’m the empress, I’m not allowed to move around while others bow in front of me. There’s nothing amusing about being the empress.’

‘Wife, if you’ll be unhappy as the empress,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Then your husband will continue being a carefree prince.’

Yan Shi Ning was certain Pei Jin didn't want to be the emperor and she thought it was a pity to waste his abilities. She was curious how he would look wearing an emperor's clothes and sitting on the throne. But an emperor had more than three thousand concubines. That thought soured her heart.

'Shi Ning, you're injured so it gives you an alibi to stay at home and make it easier for you to hide that you're pregnant,' Pei Jin said. 'For the next year I'll feed you and wait for our child to be born. Wife, why must you be pregnant? How will I endure the nights? Wife, think about it. I can see you, touch you but I can't eat you. Isn't this a way to kill me?'

Yan Shi Ning laughed at Pei Jin's pitiful face. 'Pei Jin, you can marry a second wife.'

Pei Jin looked at Yan Shi Ning like he wanted to kill her.

Yan Shi Ning pouted her lips. 'I was being sincere.'

Pei Jin's hands held Yan Shi Ning's head. 'Wife, wake up! Don't dream during the day and speak nonsense!'

Yan Shi Ning didn't show that Pei Jin's words sweetened her heart.

'Pei Jin, how are you going to deal with the empress?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, do you want to know about Bei Dou's real identity?' Pei Jin asked.

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Shi Ning, do you know about what happened to the Thinh Household in the south?' Pei Jin asked.

'Thinh Household?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'Are you talking about the Thinh Household that was convicted of treason, their properties were seized and they were killed a few years ago?'

Yan Shi Ning was surprised when she heard how many horse carriages it took to carry all of the Thinh Household's properties to the palace.

'Bei Dou's real name is Thinh Kien Nan,' Pei Jin said. 'He's the oldest son and the thirteenth generation of the Thinh Household.'

Pei Jin remembered after Bei Dou saved his life, Bei Dou pointed to the south



and asked him to call him Bei Dou. But Bei Dou's heart was in the north, Bei Dou wanted to kill the empress who framed and killed Bei Dou's family.

‘Bei Dou didn't want to be a merchant like his father and ancestors,’ Pei Jin said. ‘He likes learning about medicine. When his family home was on fire, I saved him from the fire. He suffered burns on his body and it was hard to recognise him. Wife, didn't you always ask me why Bei Dou's face doesn't change expression? It's because his real face was burnt.’

‘His... face?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘In the past he wore a mask,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Later in Southern Jiang, he met a master physician who gave him a new face. That's why no one knows his real identity.’

‘Why did you save him?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I met Bei Dou long ago,’ Pei Jin said. ‘At that time I was asked to perform duties outside the palace and I was attacked by assassins. It was Bei Dou who saved me. So when I knew about his family, I wanted to save his life.’

‘Did the Thinh Household commit treason?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘What happened to the Thinh Household involves the empress,’ Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Forty-Seven

***Related***

# Forty-Eight



## Chapter Forty-Eight

‘If I didn’t save Bei Dou’s life then I wouldn’t have known the empress secretly used the Thinh Household’s support to secure the crown prince’s position,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Then why was the Thinh Household framed?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘It was a complicated situation,’ Pei Jin said. ‘The Thinh Household became too rich and powerful and imperial father became weary of the Thinh Household. The empress and the crown prince’s supporters found out about the emperor’s plan to investigate the Thinh Household so they sent people to frame the Thinh Household to get rid of evidence of their connection with the Thinh Household. But many court officials received bribes from the Thinh Household and those court officials were implicated too. Imperial father couldn’t demote almost half of his court officials so he could only sacrifice the Thinh Household, and the empress and the crown prince escaped death by association with someone convicted of treason.’

‘Does that mean the empress and the crown prince betrayed the Thinh Household to protect themselves?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘That’s right,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Imperial father only wanted to take away the Thinh Household’s properties. He didn’t intend to kill them because he didn’t want another rebellion in Southern Jiang. But the empress and the crown prince framing the Thinh Household meant imperial father couldn’t spare anyone from

the Thinh household... Shi Ning, I want to tell you a secret that I haven't told anyone before.'

'What secret?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, apart from the emperor everyone else involved in this secret were killed,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning shivered.

'Shi Ning, my imperial grandfather intended for my imperial uncle to be emperor,' Pei Jin said. 'But my imperial father changed the name of imperial grandfather's intended heir to my imperial father's name.'

'Is that true?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin rubbed his chin.

'Pei Jin, the emperor sat on the throne before you were born,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'How did you find out?'

'My imperial uncle cryptically told me when I was a boy,' Pei Jin said. 'I didn't understand what his words meant until I became an adult.'

Pei Jin remembered how his father pretended to have a close bond with his imperial uncle, Prince Chen Nan.

Prince Chen Nan was the person who led army forces to conquer Southern Jiang. But after Prince Chen Nan returned to the imperial city he behaved like a carefree prince so citizens of the Dian Kingdom would forget about his contribution.

Up until Pei Jin was six years old, he was close to his imperial uncle who always tossed him in the air and asked about his life each time his imperial uncle returned to the imperial city. In the past he felt his imperial uncle was more of a father to him than his own father who never showed any affections toward him.

The empress gave birth to the crown prince when Pei Jin was six years old. His imperial uncle pretended he drank a lot of wine and carried him outside the palace, 'Xiao Jin, your uncle will take you horse riding.'

Pei Jin's imperial uncle held him tightly on a horse and his imperial uncle rode as fast as the wind.

‘Xiao Jin, your imperial uncle loves you,’ Prince Chen Nan said. ‘But your uncle is powerless to help you. The crown prince is born, he’ll become my imperial older brother’s heir. It’s a pity, I thought I could see you become emperor. In the past if I could predict the future then I wouldn’t pretend I didn’t know my imperial older brother, your father changed your imperial grandfather’s edict... Xiao Jin, your imperial father... still thinks I don’t know. Your imperial father has a rock head. All these years he never intended to spare me. If I wanted to be emperor then I wouldn’t have given up control over my army forces. But why is your imperial father this cruel toward me? Xiao Jin, in the future you need to act close with your imperial father.’

Pei Jin was only a six-year-old boy, he didn’t know if he misheard his imperial uncle’s words while his imperial uncle rode the horse fast as the wind. At that time he didn’t understand his imperial uncle’s words. His imperial uncle brought him back to the palace after he was tired from horse riding.

‘Xiao Jin, sit here and wait for your imperial uncle,’ Prince Chen Nan said. ‘I’m going to go ride my horse a little longer. In the past twelve years I haven’t ridden a horse this comfortably. Xiao Jin, wait for me to come back.’

Pei Jin always remembered his imperial uncle’s words that day because it was the last day his imperial uncle was alive.

That day Pei Jin waited a long time for his imperial uncle but he didn’t see his imperial uncle return to the palace. He only saw imperial guards ran into the palace, but he didn’t know what happened. He only knew his imperial uncle never appeared in front of him since that day. A long time later, he asked Consort Chen about his imperial uncle. Consort Chen told him his imperial uncle drank too much wine and rode a horse with a broken leg. His imperial uncle was flung off the horse and his head hit a rock and his imperial uncle died.

Yan Shi Ning held Pei Jin’s hand while he was crying and telling her about Prince Chen Nan.

‘Years later I sent guards to investigate my imperial uncle’s life outside the imperial city,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I didn’t expect my imperial uncle’s presence as a twenty-year-old man had a deep impact on the people of Southern Jiang. There’s a memorial in Southern Jiang to honor my imperial uncle. When I arrived in

Southern Jiang, I stayed at a villa that my imperial uncle built. My imperial uncle was a good person... but my imperial father is a cruel person.'

Yan Shi Ning wondered if Pei Jin became emperor whether he would become ruthless like his father and kill anyone that was a threat.

'My imperial uncle's words helped warn me about my life in the palace,' Pei Jin said. 'He said he was powerless to help me, but it was him who helped me with everything. He told me the truth about my environment for me to protect myself and be a step ahead of other people. Shi Ning, you said I understand my imperial father. Of course I need to understand him if I want to survive under his reign.'

Pei Jin thought it was a tragedy for a father and son to live their whole lives being weary of each other.

'I know my imperial father used many schemes to obtain the throne,' Pei Jin said. 'Whoever was a threat to steal his throne would die a pitiful death. So he didn't hold a grudge against the crown prince after he found out the empress and the crown prince framed the Thinh Household. After my imperial father waited for the Southern Jiang rebels to finally be subdued, he was disappointed the crown prince had no desire to be emperor.'

Yan Shi Ning shivered, the battles in the palace was scarier than the battles in the Yan Manor.

'Pei Jin, did the Thinh Household truly commit treason?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'No one knows for certain whether it's true or a lie,' Pei Jin said. 'Bei Dou wasn't involved in his family's trade so he didn't know what happened. Like other people, he only knew all his family members were killed. He's not certain if his family committed treason or if his family was the sacrifice to protect other people.'

'Pei Jin, how are you going to deal with the empress?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'If the empress didn't kill Consort Chen then I don't need to take revenge on the empress,' Pei Jin said. 'But Bei Dou resents the empress deeply. If it wasn't the empress, the crown prince and their supporters' betrayal then Bei Dou's family members wouldn't have died such pitiful deaths.'

'Pei Jin, are you saying that Bei Dou will deal with the empress?' Yan Shi Ning

asked.

‘Yes, I agreed with Bei Dou to let him deal with the empress,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What will he do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘In a few days the crown prince will leave the imperial city,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Bei Dou will use that opportunity as the first step of his plan. Shi Ning, what are you thinking?’

‘I’m worried about what will happen to you... if someone finds out about Bei Dou’s real identity then they’ll report it to the emperor,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning was scared she would lose Pei Jin if the emperor found out Pei Jin saved Bei Dou’s life.

‘Shi Ning, don’t worry,’ Pei Jin said. ‘We’ll use all our abilities to protect Bei Dou’s real identity.’

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning heard the sounds of a maid’s footsteps running toward their chamber.

Pei Jin got out of the bed and stood in front of the door. ‘What is it?’

‘Ninth prince, earlier a messenger delivered news that the Yan Manor is on fire,’ the maid said.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning looked concerned at each other.

That night the Yan Manor was destroyed. No one from the Yan Manor could be saved, other people could only stand at a distance and watch the Yan Manor being burned.

Yan Shi Ning’s father’s last words haunted her, ‘Shi Ning, go home...’

Yan Shi Ning realised what her father’s last words meant and she knew who lit the Yan Manor on fire. Her father protected her by destroying the Yan Manor.

Although Yan Shi Ning didn’t kill Yan Shi Ting, but her father knew it would be hard for other people to believe she didn’t kill Yan Shi Ting. If the witnesses at the Yan Manor reported what happened that day to the emperor then the emperor wouldn’t spare her, Pei Jin and everyone else in Pei Jin’s manor.

Yan Shi Ning was uncertain about her feelings toward her father that

neglected her for years. He was also the man that her mother wanted to forget but couldn't forget while her mother was alive. She resented for father for years but he used his life to compensate her.

Yan Shi Ning's mother's death was avenged. Princess Kang Hua, her father, Yan Shi Ting and all the witnesses in the Yan Manor were dead.

Yan Shi Ning only had Pei Jin left in the world. She couldn't predict the future but she could use all her abilities to protect herself and those she cared about.

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End of Chapter Forty-Eight

***Related***

# Forty-Nine



## Chapter Forty-Nine

Bei Dou's heart began to act strange.

Bei Dou thought it started since the day Yan Shi Ning was injured and he asked the 'calm' maid to clean and bandage Yan Shi Ning's chest wound. That day the 'calm' maid collapsed onto him after helping Yan Shi Ning, blood made her queasy. He had lived for more than twenty years but he didn't like being close to women. But the 'calm' maid's accidently collapsing onto him felt like he was struck by lightning.

From that day Bei Dou didn't know why he was aware of the 'calm' maid's presence. In the morning when he was practicing Kung Fu, he noticed she was carrying a tray of food somewhere nearby. In the afternoon when he walked outside to buy medicine, he noticed she was embroidering flowers. In the evening when he stood under a tree, he noticed she was climbing another tree to help retrieve a kite for another maid... he didn't know why but he was scared she would fall off the tree.

Bei Dou's fear came true, the 'calm' maid broke a branch and fell off the tree... he didn't know when he braced her fall until a group of maids surrounded him and he realised he was carrying her in his arms.

Bei Dou didn't know why he ran to brace the 'calm' maid's fall. He was



someone who prioritized himself so after she stood steady on her feet, he wanted to walk away but she stopped him.

‘Gentleman Bei, can you help me retrieve that kite?’ Xiao Tu asked.

Bei Dou thought why he needed to help the ‘calm’ maid, he didn’t have enough free time to help. But his body didn’t cooperate with his thoughts, he blinked and the kite was in his hands. His muddled head and body left the group of maids.

‘Big sister Xiao Tu, I didn’t think you would dare to talk to Gentleman Bei,’ the first maid said.

‘Big sister Xiao Tu, you even dared to ask Gentleman Bei to retrieve the kite,’ the second maid said. ‘Big sister, did you know that each time I see Gentleman Bei, I want to run away?’

‘Big sister Xiao Tu, Gentleman Bei is no different from a demon,’ the third maid said. ‘I shiver each time I see him. It’s alright if he doesn’t say anything but it’s scary to death if he speaks.’

‘That’s right,’ the fourth maid said. ‘What’s scarier is why he helped big sister Xiao Tu retrieve the kite.’

‘Gentleman Bei’s strange behaviour is scarier than his usual scary self,’ the fifth maid said. ‘In the past he never glanced at a maid so it’s strange he would help big sister Xiao Tu.’

While the group of maids were gossiping, Bei Dou stood nearby to eavesdrop. He finally found out the ‘calm’ maid’s name was Xiao Tu. He waited half a day to hear what Xiao Tu said about him.

‘Perhaps today Gentleman Bei ingested the wrong medicine,’ Xiao Tu said.

Bei Dou took a step back and fell on the ground. What wrong medicine? He stood, returned to his chamber and thought deeply about Xiao Tu’s words. He finally agreed he must haven ingested the wrong medicine otherwise he wouldn’t do something strange like brace her fall and help her retrieve a kite.

A few days later, Bei Dou’s old personal maid returned to her country home to take care of her sick mother.

Pei Jin visited Bei Dou's chamber and asked him who he wanted to be his new personal maid. He didn't know what demon possessed him but he pointed at Xiao Tu who was passing by his chamber.

'I choose her,' Bei Dou said.

'I was only passing by,' Xiao Tu said.

'Bei Dou, did you point to the wrong maid?' Pei Jin asked.

'She has steady hands,' Bei Dou said. 'She'll be able to help me with many things.'

As a result of Bei Dou's words, Xiao Tu's belongings was moved to the chamber closest to Bei Dou's chamber. He was used to having his courtyard to himself, it was a strange feeling to live close to another person. He wanted to chase her away but he also didn't want her to leave. Besides, she was pleasant to look at.

Bei Dou put the bottles of remedies down on a table and he watched Xiao Tu familiarising herself with the medicine in the drawers.

Xiao Tu was wearing a blue dress. She tiptoed on a ladder step to open the higher drawers.

Bei Dou didn't know why his eyes were focusing on her exposed arms and why his heart was pounding.

'Gentleman Bei, where is the Xue Lian herbs?' Xiao Tu asked.

Bei Dou was flustered after being caught staring at Xiao Tu. 'It's the third drawer on the same level as the seventh rung.'

'Thank you Gentleman Bei,' Xiao Tu said. 'Also, Gentleman Bei did you buy new clothes?'

Bei Dou looked at his new brown clothes and nodded his head.

'Gentleman Bei, you're too young to suit wearing brown,' Xiao Tu said. 'You're young white skin suits wearing blue clothes like the same colour as my dress.'

Bei Dou wondered how soon Gentleman Su could make him ten new blue clothes.

Suddenly Bei Dou heard Xiao Tu cried out, he blinked and he didn't know when

he braced her fall. His neck to his forehead turned red after he realised he was carrying her in his arms.

In that moment Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning walked into Bei Dou's chamber.

'I didn't see anything,' Pei Jin provoked.

Bei Dou glared at Pei Jin. Then Bei Dou heard Yan Shi Ning's demoness laugh so he put Xiao Tu onto the floor.

'Wife, someone is experiencing spring,' Pei Jin said.

'Husband, you're right,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Gentleman Bei is at the right age to marry and have children.'

'That's right,' Pei Jin said. 'It's my carelessness to forget. Wife, let's go outside for a stroll so we won't delay Gentleman Bei's progress.'

'Let's go,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Bei Dou's head spun at the sounds of the beautiful compatible pair mocking him. But Xiao Tu wasn't flustered because she didn't understand Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's words.

'You can leave,' Bei Dou said to Xiao Tu.

Xiao Tu obediently carried the bottle of Xue Lian and walked outside.

'Bei Dou, you have good vision,' Pei Jin praised. 'What's her name?'

'Xiao Tu!' Bei Dou said in a frustrated tone.

'Bei Dou, you certainly remember her name clearly,' Pei Jin provoked.

Bei Dou was also confused why he remembered Xiao Tu's name.

'She's Duan Ba Hou's granddaughter,' Pei Jin said. 'Duan Ba Hou met misfortune and sent her to my teacher. My teacher sent her to his acquaintance whom he saved their life. After my teacher's acquaintance died, she was sent to my manor. Although she's a maid, she's still a young lady from a prominent household so I arranged for her not to serve anyone. I intended to wait for her to age a little more before marrying her off to a good household. But now it appears I don't need to anymore.'

'I'm not marrying her!' Bei Dou said.

‘I didn’t ask you to marry her,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Why are you protesting?’

Bei Dou was speechless and his face flushed red.

‘But if you’re this resolute then I’ll need to continue finding a good household for her,’ Pei Jin provoked.

‘You can’t do that... I’m teaching her about medicine,’ Bei Dou said. ‘She’s intelligent... it’ll be a pity if she starts a family too soon... I want her to be my pupil.’

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning looked at each other then they laughed loudly.

‘Why did you come here to look for me?’ Bei Dou said.

‘Tomorrow the crown prince is leaving the imperial city,’ Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou’s body stiffened. After Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning left, Bei Dou opened a drawer, pulled out a sword and sunlight reflected off the sword in four directions.

It was the sword the empress used to bribe the Thinh Household to support the crown prince. It was the most deadly sword in the world. Bei Dou wanted to use the sword to kill the empress in the palace.

Xiao Tu returned to Bei Dou’s chamber and she stood still after she saw Bei Dou’s deadly aura while holding the sword.

Bei Dou put away the sword because he thought it scared Xiao Tu.

‘Gentleman Bei, do you want to go kill someone?’ Xiao Tu asked calmly.

Bei Dou nodded his head.

Xiao Tu put down a bottle on a table. ‘This is the bottle of poison I brewed as Gentleman Bei instructed. Gentleman Bei, do you want me to cover the sword with this poison?’

Bei Dou was speechless, he didn’t know why Xiao Tu wasn’t scared.

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Short Side Story Three

Bei Dou: I fell in love at first sight.

Xiao Tu: I fell in love over a long period.

Bei Dou: But I was naive.

Xiao Tu: He was naive so I had to take the first step toward him.

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End of Chapter Forty-Nine

***Related***

# Fifty



## Chapter Fifty

At the end of autumn.

‘You bastard child!’ the empress cursed and sobbed.

‘Imperial mother, this time I’m leaving the imperial city forever,’ Pei Lam said. ‘Imperial mother, take good care of your health.’

‘No!’ the empress said. ‘You’ll come back. Wait until your imperial father calms down and sees Pei Lam’s false heart and you’ll be called back.’

The empress didn’t want to accept all her years of scheming would fail. She only had one son, how could she accept being separated from her son?

‘Imperial mother, status, power and money will turn to smoke,’ Pei Lam said. ‘Your heart doesn’t need to waste energy about smoke.’

Pei Lam knelt in front of his mother, hit his forehead on the floor and left his mother’s chamber.

Pei Lam’s words prompted the empress to remember a year ago the grandmaster she met told her the same fortune that everything will turn to smoke and it was better to let go of swords to free the heart.

Pei Lam’s father had refused to see him since that day he stabbed himself. He didn’t know if his father would be willing to see him before he left the palace.

Pei Lam stood in front of his father’s chamber and looked at the fallen flower petals. He knew his father was too angry to see him but he was amused at his childish father.

Wang Fu Mu was frightened how Pei Lam could smile in Pei Lam’s situation. ‘Crown prince.’

Pei Lam turned around and he saw Wang Fu Mu who served his father for more than twenty years. Wang Fu Mu was a little eunuch at the age of ten and later became his father’s advisor. He knew Wang Fu Mu was someone who was capable otherwise Wang Fu Mu wouldn’t be the closest person to his father.

Wang Fu Mu was even more frightened after Pei Lam bowed to him. ‘Crown prince, what are you doing? Your servant doesn’t dare to receive.’

‘You have a fast mouth,’ Pei Lam said.

Wang Fu Mu thought Pei Lam was possessed by a demon. ‘Crown prince, the emperor doesn’t want to see you. It’s better if crown prince visit another day that isn’t cold like today.’



‘I don’t know if I can see my imperial father when he isn’t angry anymore,’ Pei Lam said.

Earlier Wang Fu Mu informed the emperor that Pei Lam wanted to see the emperor and thought it was pitiful to see how disappointed the emperor was in Pei Lam. He thought perhaps after the emperor calms down and couldn’t tolerate Pei Zhang anymore then the emperor would summon Pei Lam to return to the palace.

Pei Lam knew Wang Fu Mu was a fox who would survive many more years in the palace. He bowed to Wang Fu Mu to force Wang Fu Mu to do him a favor and pass on his warning to his father.

Wang Fu Mu bowed his head lower than Pei Lam’s bowed head.

‘Wang Fu Mu, if my imperial father doesn’t want to see me then I’ll trouble you to pass my warning to my imperial father,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I trust you’ll pass on my warning to my imperial father.’

‘Your servant will listen to crown prince’s words carefully,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

‘Warn my imperial father to be careful of ninth brother,’ Pei Lam said.

‘Crown prince, what does that mean?’ Wang Fu Mu asked.

‘Ninth brother was involved in the harvest festival incident,’ Pei Lam said.

‘Your servant understands,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

Pei Lam knelt in front of his father’s chamber, hit his forehead on the ground and left the palace.

Wang Fu Mu entered the emperor’s chamber and he didn’t know what the emperor was thinking while staring out the window. He thought out of the princes, Pei Jin was the most similar to the emperor but he didn’t know why the emperor treated Pei Jin coldly.

‘Your majesty, the crown prince has left the palace,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

The emperor turned around and glared at Wang Fu Mu. ‘He is no longer the crown prince.’

Wang Fu Mu knew the emperor wasn’t angry at him but was angry to be



reminded of why Pei Lam wasn't the crown prince anymore.

'What did he say?' the emperor asked.

'The crown prince wants your majesty to take care of your majesty's health,' Wang Fu Mu said. 'The crown prince also warned you to be careful of seventh prince.'

Wang Fu Mu knew if there was a day Pei Lam returned to the palace then he would be executed for deceiving the emperor. But he was willing to risk his life for Pei Jin to succeed.

'Be careful of seventh prince?' the emperor asked. 'Why did the crown prince say that to you?'

'The crown prince didn't say why,' Wang Fu Mu said.

'I understand,' the emperor said.

Outside the palace gates many imperial guards escorted Pei Lam outside the imperial city because the empress was concerned about Pei Lam's safety.

Pei Lam thought his mother's concern for his safety was wasted.

The horse carriage travelled for a long time then it suddenly it stopped.

Pei Lam closed his eyes and he could feel there was bad news outside the horse carriage.

'Crown prince, ninth prince is in front of the horse carriage,' an imperial guard said.

Pei Lam opened the curtains and he saw Pei Jin sat on a horse with the sunlight glaring behind Pei Jin.

'Tenth brother,' Pei Jin said.

'Ninth brother, why are you here?' Pei Lam asked.

'We're close brothers like arms and legs,' Pei Jin said. 'Of course I'm here to escort you outside the imperial city.'

'Ninth brother, you're wasting your heart's energy,' Pei Lam said.

'I heard you're going to a remote town that's extremely cold,' Pei Jin said. 'Did

you bring enough warm clothes?’

‘I brought enough,’ Pei Lam said.

Pei Jin frowned. ‘Your ninth sister asked me to say farewell to you on her behalf.’

Pei Lam hated thinking of Yan Shi Ning as Pei Jin’s wife but he smiled politely. ‘Ninth brother, other people are envious you’re married to ninth sister.’

‘Tenth brother, for many years I still can’t see through your true heart,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Ninth brother, aren’t you also someone that’s hard for other people to see your true heart?’ Pei Lam asked.

Pei Jin’s back turned cold at the sight of Pei Lam’s disturbing smile. ‘Your ninth brother is a simpleton.’

‘The day is late,’ Pei Lam said. ‘Ninth brother should return home.’

‘Tenth brother, take care of your health,’ Pei Jin said. ‘We’ll see each other again.’

‘We won’t see each other again,’ Pei Lam said.

Pei Jin was startled at the calm conviction in Pei Lam’s tone. He didn’t know what Pei Lam’s intentions were.

Pei Jin watched Pei Lam’s horse carriage leave for a while then Bei Dou appeared next to him.

‘There are twenty-eight imperial guards,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Can you cope?’

Bei Dou nodded his head.

‘Alright then go smooth as the wind,’ Pei Jin said.

Inside the horse carriage Pei Lam closed his eyes and ignored the bumpy ground. What Yan Shi Ning said to Yan Shi Ting at the Yan Manor echoed in his ears, ‘Shi Ting, I’m truly sorry. I didn’t think I’ll cause you to become like this. But don’t worry, after she dies, I’ll take good care of you.’

Pei Lam realised Yan Shi Ning wasn’t as beautiful and good as he thought. She was involved in his disastrous wedding day and Pei Jin was the person behind

everything. Luckily he found out before he left the palace. He left his father a final warning for his father to see Pei Jin’s true black heart and the palace would no longer be peaceful.

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End of Chapter Fifty

***Related***

# Fifty-One



## Chapter Fifty-One

To leave the imperial city it was impossible to avoid mountain terrains.

‘Who are you to dare to obstruct the path?’ an imperial guard asked.

‘Stop the pleasantries,’ Pei Lam said and took off his mask. ‘Prepare to sacrifice your lives.’

Pei Lam's sharp sword tasted fresh blood. Sunlight shone on the bloody ground. More imperial guards appeared because they thought Pei Lam's life was in danger, but they were immediately killed under Pei Lam's sword and their dead bodies collapsed on the ground. The last face they saw were Pei Lam's disturbing smile.

Pei Lam searched forty dead bodies for someone similar to his build and looks to exchange clothes with him. Then he flung the forty dead bodies down the mountain.

Pei Lam escaped on a horse and heard silence in four directions. He was happy he no longer had to be Pei Lam and truly free.

Pei Lam rode for a while but a person with a cold demon face who wore black clothes obstructed his path.

'It's you,' Pei Lam said.

Pei Lam recognised Bei Dou who had a cold demon face that never changed expression and was also Pei Jin's servant but he didn't know why Bei Dou followed him.

'Thank you,' Bei Dou said and raised his sword.

Later at Pei Jin's manor, Bei Dou recounted what happened to Pei Lam and Pei Lam's imperial guards.

'You said thank you to him?' Pei Jin asked.

'Of course I should thank him for dealing with the imperial guards,' Bei Dou said.

'I didn't think he would kill everyone to escape,' Pei Jin said. 'What are his true intentions?'

'Perhaps he wants to start a new life,' Bei Dou said.

'A new life?' Pei Jin asked. 'If that isn't true then it's hard to explain his actions. I didn't expect tenth brother was someone like this. I thought he asked imperial father to take away his position to wait for a good opportunity to strike... where are you hiding him?'

'Su Ci,' Bei Dou said and looked in four directions.

‘Gentleman Bei, who are your wandering eyes looking for?’ Pei Jin teased.

‘There are sand in my eyes,’ Bei Dou lied.

Pei Jin spat out tea. ‘Why don’t you find your precious pupil to help you? Wait, don’t disturb her. She’s studying effects of some poisons in the courtyard with Xiao Zai... wait, where are you running to... tomorrow I’m summoned to the palace, you need to be prepared.’

Pei Jin thought Bei Dou was in a deep spring trance after only a few days.

In the courtyard Bei Dou’s expression darkened, he saw Xiao Zai sat too close to Xiao Tu.

Bei Dou’s deadly eyes focused on Xiao Tu. ‘You, follow me to my chamber!’

Xiao Tu calmly followed Bei Dou to his chamber. ‘Gentleman Bei, what’s wrong?’

‘There are sand in my eyes,’ Bei Dou said. ‘Help take them out for me.’

Xiao Tu was speechless.

Inside Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s chamber, Yan Shi Ning’s chest wound had healed. It wasn’t a surprise considering for half a month she was forced to ingest nutritious food and herbal remedies to improve her health while pregnant and recovering from her injury.

Pei Jin thought Yan Shi Ning’s body was even more appealing while she was pregnant. The problem was he could only see, kiss and touch her but he couldn’t eat her because Bei Dou advised him it was dangerous for him to eat her while she was pregnant.

‘Wife...’ Pei Jin said pitifully.

Yan Shi Ning knew what Pei Jin wanted. She pulled the blanket over her body and avoided his hands.

‘Wife...’ Pei Jin sulked.

‘No,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Only one time,’ Pei Jin said.

‘No,’ Yan Shi Ning said and rolled over.

‘You don’t care about me,’ Pei Jin said in a frustrated tone.

Yan Shi Ning turned her head to look at Pei Jin’s pitiful face.

‘Little sister Ning, don’t you pity me?’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning played dead on her back to avoid putting pressure on their child.

‘This child is hateful,’ Pei Jin said.

‘This child is still yours even if this child is hateful,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning, don’t forget this child is yours too-’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning kicked Pei Jin off the bed. ‘MF Pei Jin, tonight you’re not allowed to sleep on this bed.’

Pei Jin wore his outer robe and unwillingly left the chamber.

Xiao Zai was guarding outside the chamber and saw Pei Jin’s pitiful face.

‘If you don’t stop smiling then you’ll be in trouble,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin was lenient on Xiao Zai because Xiao Zai protected Yan Shi Ning’s life at the Yan Manor. Also, Xiao Zai had begged Yan Shi Ning to save Xiao Zai from him so he only scared Xiao Zai a little.

Xiao Zai believed Pei Jin’s threat, he stopped smiling and looked like he was at his parent’s funeral. ‘Ninth prince, I don’t know if it’s appropriate for me to tell you this.’

‘Hurry and say it,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Ninth prince, the truth is... after your wife is three months pregnant as long as you’re gentle it’s safe,’ Xiao Zai said.

Pei Jin’s eyes shone brightly. ‘Truly?’

Xiao Zai nodded his head.

‘How do you know?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘I read it in one of Gentleman Bei’s books,’ Xiao Zai said.

‘Bei Dou you lied to me again!’ Pei Jin cried out.

Last time Bei Dou lied to Pei Jin that Pei Jin had to wait half a month instead to

seven days to have a wedding night with Yan Shi Ning. But Bei Dou dared to lie to him that he had to wait a year after Yan Shi Ning was pregnant to eat her.

Xiao Zai was happy Pei Jin wanted to kill Bei Dou. Xiao Zai thought it was Bei Dou's fault for interrupting Xiao Zai's alone time with Xiao Tu.

'Xiao Zai, how did you find out about my situation with my wife?' Pei Jin asked suspiciously.

'I... I didn't hear anything,' Xiao Zai lied.

'Xiao Hui, lock this eavesdropper in the firewood storage room!' Pei Jin said. 'Don't let him eat for two days!'

'Yes, ninth prince,' Xiao Hui said.

'Xiao Hui, you don't have to use brute force,' Xiao Zai said. 'I know how to walk... ah... you don't need to carry me... ah... you don't need to throw me into the firewood storage room.'

Xiao Hui locked the firewood storage room and left.

That night Pei Jin knocked Bei Dou unconscious.

Early the following morning Bei Dou woke up and saw Xiao Tu was laying on top him.

'Why... are you here?' Bei Dou asked and pulled the blanket over his body.

Xiao Tu rubbed her eyes and looked at her surroundings. 'Gentleman Bei, why am I here?'

In that moment Pei Jin opened Bei Dou's door and entered Bei Dou's chamber.

'What am I seeing?' Pei Jin asked innocently. 'Everyone look away!'

Bei Dou's mouth and eyes widened after seeing the crowd behind Pei Jin.

'Everyone remember we didn't see a lady on Gentleman Bei's bed!' Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou wanted to kill Pei Jin.

'Gentleman Bei, are you going to marry me?' Xiao Tu asked.

Bei Dou's throat felt choked.

'Gentleman Bei that means I'll need to die,' Xiao Tu said and cried.



‘You’re not allowed to die!’ Bei Dou said.

‘Gentleman Bei, you don’t have to force yourself to marry me,’ Xiao Tu said.

‘I’m not forcing myself!’ Bei Dou said. ‘You’re a good person!’

Xiao Tu hugged Bei Dou and cried happy tears. ‘Gentleman Bei!’

Inside the firewood storage room Xiao Zai felt he was struck by lightning after he heard Bei Dou was marrying Xiao Tu.

The moment Xiao Hui opened the door Xiao Zai cried pitifully and hugged Xiao Hui.

‘Xiao Hui, I lost Xiao Tu!’ Xiao Zai said.

Xiao Hui pushed Xiao Zai away before Xiao Zai could wipe snot on Xiao Hui’s clothes.

Xiao Hui threw wrapped buns at Xiao Zai. ‘Hurry and eat the buns!’

‘Big brother Xiao Hui is a good big brother!’ Xiao Zai praised.

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End of Chapter Fifty-One

***Related***

# Fifty-Two



## Chapter Fifty-Two

Bei Dou followed Pei Jin to the palace.

Bei Dou disappeared after Pei Jin entered the emperor's chamber.

The emperor sat on the highest chair and he wore a somber expression. While Consort Mu and seventh prince sat happily beside the emperor and the empress was in her chamber and her heart was missing the absent crown prince.

‘Xiao Jin, I heard Shi Ning’s body has been unwell,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Is she feeling better today?’

Pei Jin hid Yan Shi Ning’s chest injury for two months. He explained to his imperial family that Yan Shi Ning had a chest infection and he had invited many physicians to clear her chest infection but she was still ill.

Since the harvest festival incident Consort Mu and seventh prince’s spies couldn’t enter Pei Jin’s manor to confirm if Yan Shi Ning was pregnant.

‘Compared to a few days ago Shi Ning’s body is recovering,’ Pei Jin said. ‘But to be safe Shi Ning needs to rest for a few more days. Shi Ning asks for imperial father and mother’s forgiveness.’

The emperor frowned. Even Pei Jin’s wife had a weak body then the Dian Kingdom would have to wait longer for the emperor to have the first grandson.

‘Shi Ning can visit your imperial father and me later,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Shi Ning’s health is more important. But I haven’t seen her for two months... perhaps Xiao Jin’s physicians...’ She turned to look concern at the emperor. ‘Why don’t I send my imperial physician to examine Shi Ning?’

Consort Mu wouldn’t feel at ease until she could confirm if Yan Shi Ning was ill or pregnant. If Pei Jin declined her offer then she would know Yan Shi Ning was pregnant.

‘Mother that is kind of you,’ Pei Jin said.

The emperor was frustrated to hear Consort Mu looking down on Pei Jin. Although Pei Jin didn’t compete with his other sons or request anything from him, Pei Jin was still his son. He couldn’t believe Pei Jin didn’t even request for him to send an imperial physician to examine Shi Ning who was ill for more than two months.

The emperor frowned while assessing his three sons that were in his chamber. One son was too cruel, another son was an enigma and the youngest son still didn’t know how to speak clearly.

Wang Fu Mu rushed into the emperor’s chamber and he could see the emperor’s thoughts.

‘What happened?’ the emperor asked.

‘Your majesty, earlier seventh prince’s second wife’s messenger informed that she fainted,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

The emperor glared at Wang Fu Mu who dared to smile while reporting bad news to him.

‘The imperial physician who examined seventh prince’s second wife said that she is pregnant,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

‘Truly?’ the emperor asked suspiciously.

Wang Fu Mu glanced at Consort Mu and he wondered if Consort Mu would dare to learn from the empress and Princess Kang Hua’s bad example.

‘Emperor, please grant my request to let Long Thi enter the palace for your imperial physician to examine her,’ Consort Mu said. ‘I’m worried she’ll miscarry.’

The emperor nodded his head and he thought perhaps he was going to have his first grandson soon.

Consort Mu and seventh prince exchanged a secret smile at each other.

Consort Mu and seventh prince knew Long Thi was pregnant for a while and purposely sent a messenger to the palace to announce the news to the emperor. As they expected the emperor didn’t need to see Long Thi but sent imperial physicians to confirm Long Thi’s pregnancy.

The imperial physicians returned to the palace and reported to the emperor that Long Thi was pregnant.

‘Congratulations imperial father,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Congratulations mother, congratulations seventh brother!’

‘I hope to hear good news from ninth brother too,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘It’s up to the heavens,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Zhang didn’t know Yan Shi Ning was pregnant so Pei Zhang felt exhilarated. Pei Zhang knew the crown prince position was within his grasp because there was no one worthy to compete with him.

The emperor wasn’t impressed by Pei Zhang’s arrogance.

‘Wang Fu Mu, ask someone to send valuable gifts to Shi Ning and Long Thi,’ the emperor said.

Pei Zhang was satisfied his father was rewarding Long Thi but he was unhappy his father also rewarded Shi Ning.

Pei Jin understood his father’s dissatisfaction toward Pei Zhang and Pei Jin thought his little lion was the one who benefited from the tension between his

father and Pei Zhang.

After the Yan Manor was burned, the emperor compensated Yan Shi Ning with many gifts because the emperor wanted to let other people know Yan Shi Ning wasn't mistreated marrying into the imperial family.

Pei Jin sighed inwardly, his father was either suspicious of him or used him to provoke other people.

'Ninth son, seventh son has many wives for the imperial family to thrive,' the emperor said. 'Perhaps I should select a second wife and concubines for ninth son.'

Pei Zhang raged after he heard his father's words implied his father was considering Pei Jin to become crown prince.

Pei Jin only wanted to protect Yan Shi Ning and their child. If his father forced him to marry other women then it would cause chaos in his and Yan Shi Ning's home. He knew if he declined his father's offer then his father would know Yan Shi Ning was pregnant... but he was a little happy his father wanted him to have children because it meant his father wasn't the one who poisoned Yan Shi Ning.

Suddenly an imperial guard charged into the emperor's chamber.

'Your majesty, the crown prince's body was found at the bottom of a mountain,' the imperial guard said.

The emperor felt like lightning struck him. 'What did you say?'

'Your majesty, I don't dare to identify the crown prince's body,' the imperial said.

'Don't dare?' the emperor asked. 'How can you not dare to identify someone who's alive and healthy?'

'Your majesty... the crown prince's body isn't whole... but his body was discovered next to the broken body at the bottom of the mountain,' the imperial guard said.

The imperial guard gave the emperor the pendant the emperor gave Pei Lam long ago.

The emperor's heart ached to pieces. He remembered memories of his beloved

Pei Lam since Pei Lam was a boy to an adult. He didn't want to believe his precious Pei Lam died a painful death and Pei Lam's body wasn't whole.

'Who?' the emperor asked. 'Who killed my only crown prince?'

The emperor cried pitifully. He thought he was temporarily separated from Pei Lam, he never expected they would be separated by death.

'Give back my crown prince!' the emperor ordered. 'I want my crown prince back here and whole!'

Everyone was startled to see the emperor shed tears in front of them.

Consort Mu and seventh prince's backs were cold and sweaty after the emperor glared accusingly at them. They knew they had a motive to kill Pei Lam but they couldn't prove their innocence.

Wang Fu Mu didn't have an opportunity to speak to Pei Jin since Pei Jin entered the palace so Wang Fu Mu wondered if Consort Mu and Pei Zhang did kill Pei Lam.

Pei Jin was startled to realise how deeply his father loved Pei Lam. If he was the one who died instead of Pei Lam, he doubted his father would cry a single tear for him.

Pei Jin wondered how his father would react if his father found out Pei Lam was the one who faked Pei Lam's death.

'Everyone leave!' the emperor ordered.

Before everyone left the emperor's chamber, Wang Fu Mu exchanged a secret look with Pei Jin so Pei Jin waited nearby the chamber for Wang Fu Mu.

After a while Wang Fu Mu secretly met Pei Jin.

'How is my imperial father?' Pei Jin asked.

'His majesty is grieving and an imperial physician sedated his majesty,' Wang Fu Mu said.

'I'll need to trouble you to take care of my imperial father's health,' Pei Jin said and bowed.

'Your servant doesn't dare to receive,' Wang Fu Mu said.

Wang Fu Mu secretly passed a small folded paper to Pei Jin.

‘Then I’ll be leaving first,’ Pei Jin said.

Inside the horse carriage Pei Jin opened the folded paper, ‘I don’t know why tenth prince knows about the harvest festival incident. Tenth prince asked me to warn the emperor to be careful of ninth prince. So tenth prince can’t return to the palace.’

The atmosphere in Consort Mu’s chamber was tensed.

‘Xiao Zhang, did you kill Pei Lam?’ Consort Mu asked.

Pei Zhang shook his head. ‘If I wanted to kill him then I wouldn’t kill him in this critical period.’

‘Then who is the killer?’ Consort Mu asked. ‘Before his unexpected death everything was within our control. Did you see how your imperial father wanted to swallow us whole?’

‘I can see imperial father doesn’t want me to be crown prince,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Mother, did you hear what imperial father said... my only crown prince. Tenth brother is dead! I want to see apart from me who else imperial father dare to choose as the crown prince.’

‘That’s right,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Even if we did kill him, no one can do anything to us. Your imperial father lost one son, he wouldn’t want to lose another son. We only need to be patient and wait for your imperial father to calm down. But I don’t know what the killer’s motive is.’

‘Perhaps his enemy,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘That’s too simple to be true,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Hurry and send an imperial physician to examine Yan Shi Ning. If she’s pregnant then it’ll cause more trouble for us.’

‘Mother, I understand,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Xiao Zhang, what do you think about your ninth brother?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘In the past I thought he was a complicated person,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘But looking at the past now I think he is a simpleton. Perhaps he truly wants to be a carefree prince.’

Consort Mu shook her head. 'I think there is a possibility your ninth brother wants to oppose us.'

'Mother, what are you saying?' Pei Zhang asked.

'He knows I'm involved with the Fu Gui incense sticks,' Consort Mu said. 'I think he retaliated by killing Pei Lam to warn us. Xiao Zhang, think about how many calamities happened after he returned to the imperial city from Southern Jiang... the harvest festival, news of Yan Shi Ting's fake pregnancy was spread to us through his servant... perhaps he intended to borrow our dagger to kill others... also how Yan Shi Ting mysteriously fell into the well is suspicious.'

'Is ninth brother that dangerous?' Pei Zhang asked.

Consort Mu silently contemplated deeply.

'If he wants to fight for the throne then he needs to be a capable person,' Pei Zhang said. 'Besides we're already cautious of him and know who are connected to him. He is someone who has no strong allies and has no power in the imperial court.'

'But we can't rely on our assumptions,' Consort Mu said. 'We need to continue to spy on his activities.'

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End of Chapter Fifty-Two

***Related***



# Fifty-Three



## Chapter Fifty-Three

At home Pei Jin reflected about Wang Fu Mu's note.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin toss and turn on the bed.

'Pei Jin, are you a cong you bing?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning kicked Pei Jin who was crawling under her inner robe.

'Shi Ning, your temper is worse by the day,' Pei Jin teased.

Yan Shi Ning didn't want to admit Pei Jin was right about her temper.

'What are you going to do if you can't tolerate my temper?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Of course I can tolerate your temper,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin knew if he teased Yan Shi Ning too much then she would kick him outside their chamber.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin was troubled about something otherwise he wouldn't have trouble sleeping. 'Pei Jin, what's wrong? Did something happen in the palace?'

'Shi Ning, what do you think about tenth brother?' Pei Jin asked.

'He's soft, calm and beautiful,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'At a glance he looks like someone harmless.'

‘What if my harmless tenth brother wants to harm me?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin explained to Yan Shi Ning about Wang Fu Mu’s note.

‘We didn’t leave a trace at the harvest festival,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘How did the crown prince know we were involved?’

‘I don’t know why he knows but he wouldn’t want to warn imperial father unless he has evidence,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning thought perhaps it was her fault that the crown prince found evidence. She slowly recalled everything that happened at the Yan Manor and she suspected the crown prince was involved in Yan Shi Ting’s death.

‘Pei Jin, do you remember I told you Yan Shi Ting’s death was suspicious?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head. He remembered Yan Shi Ning wasn’t certain if someone pushed Yan Shi Ting into the well or Yan Shi Ting accidentally fell into the well.

‘Shi Ning are you saying that tenth brother killed Yan Shi Ting?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘That day Yan Shi Ting scared me and I left her in the gardens,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘A while later her body was found in the well. I remember in the gardens there’s a sculpture. Perhaps the crown prince was hiding behind it that day, overheard what I said to Yan Shi Ting and that’s how he knows we were involved in the wedding incident.’

‘Shi Ning if your speculations are true then why would tenth brother kill Yan Shi Ting?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t believe someone who looked harmless like the crown prince would push Yan Shi Ting into the well. ‘Pei Jin, perhaps my speculations are wrong and the crown prince didn’t kill Yan Shi Ting.’

Pei Jin knew Yan Shi Ning was frightened that a harmless Pei Lam was capable of heartlessly killing Yan Shi Ting. ‘Shi Ning, I didn’t want to go see tenth brother but now I need to go see him.’

Yan Shi Ning heard the sadness in Pei Jin’s tone. After Bei Dou captured the

crown prince, Bei Dou locked the crown prince in a secure place. But Pei Jin never visited the crown prince and she thought perhaps Pei Jin wanted to maintain the small brotherly bond between them.

‘In the past I was reluctant to let Bei Dou deal with the crown prince,’ Pei Jin said. ‘But now I know I was naive. If imperial father found out the truth then three years of firewood collected would be burned within a shichen hour.’

Yan Shi Ning was scared Pei Jin’s fear was true and the emperor would kill Pei Jin if the emperor found out the truth.

‘Pei Jin, why does the emperor hate you?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I thought about why for many years,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I even suspected I wasn’t imperial father’s blood son.’

‘Pei Jin, you know that’s not true,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If you’re not the emperor’s blood son then you wouldn’t be alive now.’

‘That’s why at the right opportunity I need to ask my imperial father why he hates me,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning’s heart ached for Pei Jin because it was something that troubled his heart for years.

‘Pei Jin, there’s something else,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘What?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Why would Wang Fu Mu who is the closest person to the emperor pass a note to you?’ Yan Shi Ning asked suspiciously.

Pei Jin hesitated to answer.

‘Last time you promised you wouldn’t hide anything else from me!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning... you didn’t ask me about this so I didn’t lie to you,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Shi Ning... I’ll tell you another secret I haven’t told anyone else before.’

Yan Shi Ning silently listened to Pei Jin talk about Wang Fu Mu.

‘When Wang Fu Mu was a young eunuch he was bullied in the palace,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Like when he was thirteen years old he knocked over a vase and was nearly

beaten to death. He used the strength he had left to run and hide in a chamber. Inside the chamber was a young man who pulled out a pill and put it in Wang Fu Mu's life. The young man climbed the window after he heard other people chasing after Wang Fu Mu. The pill Wang Fu Mu swallowed was a rare pill that protected a person's qi. It saved Wang Fu Mu's life. At that time Wang Fu Mu didn't know who his mysterious young savior was. But it motivated Wang Fu Mu to survive long enough to repay his savior so he slowly built connections in the palace.'

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's hand. 'Three years later Wang Fu Mu met his savior again. It was my imperial uncle, Prince Chen Nan who returned to the palace on horseback after conquering Southern Jiang. Wang Fu Mu didn't dare to say that he knew the heroic Prince Chen Nan. So imperial uncle didn't recognise Wang Fu Mu. Later their fates changed. Wang Fu Mu crawled into a high position and my imperial uncle's status slowly diminished. Wang Fu Mu's heart ached for his savior. Wang Fu Mu secretly followed imperial uncle to help imperial uncle at the right opportunity. But he failed to find out imperial father had put a sleeping pill into imperial uncle's wine cup until after imperial uncle fell off a horse and died.'

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin's sadness.

'Wang Fu Mu secretly grieved for imperial uncle's death while serving imperial father,' Pei Jin said. 'Wang Fu Mu failed to repay imperial uncle for saving his life. But Wang Fu Mu remembered out of all the emperor's sons, imperial uncle loved me the most. So Wang Fu Mu secretly protected me to repay imperial uncle. Imperial father regards Wang Fu Mu highly because imperial father believes Wang Fu Mu doesn't favor any of imperial father's sons. Even I didn't know Wang Fu Mu was secretly protecting me for a long time.'

'How did you find out?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, do you remember the first day I arrived in Xuan Qing?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning's teeth itched while she remembered her pitiful six-year-old self who was bullied by Pei Jin.

'During that period Consort Chen died,' Pei Jin said. 'Assassins were sent to kill me but Wang Fu Mu warned me to be careful otherwise I wouldn't be alive now... like during Consort Chen's funeral, Wang Fu Mu warned me to be careful

of my food and drinks. The empress sent a bowl of soup to me and I listened to Wang Fu Mu's warning. I used a silver needle to test the bowl of soup, it was poisoned. Afterward I looked for Wang Fu Mu and he told me about how imperial uncle saved his life. Then he advised me to follow my teacher to Xuan Qing on the pretence that I'm grieving for Consort Chen's death...'

'Is that why you came to Xuan Qing?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Yes,' Pei Jin said.

'Imperial uncle said he was powerless to help you but he helped you a lot,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'That's right,' Pei Jin said. 'Without imperial uncle then I would have died long ago. I wouldn't have met you and we wouldn't have conceived a child together... Shi Ning, we can't hide your pregnancy for much longer.'

'Why?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Imperial father wants me to follow seventh brother's example,' Pei Jin said. 'Imperial father asked me if he could choose a second wife and concubines for me.'

Yan Shi Ning hid the sadness in her heart and smiled. 'That's a good suggestion. I think our home is a little cold. If there are more people then it'll become lively.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning silently looked at each other's eyes while smiling.

'Wife, how can you lie this well?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning looked innocently at Pei Jin. 'What I said earlier was sincere.'

Pei Jin's hands moved closer to Yan Shi Ning's body. 'Truly?'

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Shi Ning, why aren't you scared of being tickled anymore?' Pei Jin asked.

'I'm used to you,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin frowned, he couldn't tickle Yan Shi Ning to force her to tell the truth.

'When will we need to tell others I'm pregnant?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘We’ll wait a little longer to protect our child,’ Pei Jin said.

‘I’ll be more cautious after others know I’m pregnant,’ Yan Shi Ning promised.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. ‘Shi Ning, don’t worry. I’m here to protect you. When I’m not here I’ll ask my guards to secretly protect you.’

The night sky darkened but Yan Shi Ning couldn’t sleep.

Pei Jin remembered Xiao Zai’s confession and his eyes brightened.

‘Wife, tonight we can’t sleep,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Why don’t we do it together?’

‘No,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Yes,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin took off Yan Shi Ning’s inner robe and his head crawled under her undergarments.

Yan Shi Ning felt Pei Jin’s warm mouth suckled her breasts and her body turned limp.

Pei Jin nibbled Yan Shi Ning’s erect nipples.

‘It hurts...’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning, does your chest wound hurt?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning blushed and shook her head. ‘You bit too hard.’

‘Shi Ning... later I’ll let you bite me,’ Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Three

***Related***

# part 1



The way out – is through the door, why is it that no one will use this method? (Confucius) HBAG – Chapter Fifty-Four (Part 1) contains mature content. Reader needs to be a matured age to read chapter fifty-four (part 1). The way out is exiting the window for premature readers.

## Chapter Fifty-Four (Part 1)

Pei Jin spread Yan Shi Ning's legs and he suckled her sweetness between her legs.

'You don't need too...' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin raised his head, his hands held Yan Shi Ning's bottom and positioned her sweetness under his erection and roughly rubbed her sweetness.

'Shi Ning, what do you need?' Pei Jin teased.

Under Pei Jin's teasing, Yan Shi Ning's body burned with desire, her eyes misted, her nipples erected, her back arched tensely and nectar seeped out of her sweetness between her legs.

Pei Jin's erection felt Yan Shi Ning's wetness and he inserted his fingers inside her.

'Shi Ning, do you need this?' Pei Jin teased.

Pei Jin's fingers stroked inside Yan Shi Ning but his fingers evaded the most sensitive spot inside her.

'Umm...' Yan Shi Ning moaned.

Pei Jin's fingers slowly stroked harder. 'Shi Ning, what do you need?'

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin was purposely teasing her body to frustration. She didn't want to admit she wanted him inside her.

'Shi Ning, do you want to do it?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning gritted her teeth. 'Pei-Jin-I-want-to-sleep!'

Yan Shi Ning tried to wiggle her body away from Pei Jin's body.

Pei Jin refused to let Yan Shi Ning escape. He hadn't eaten her for three months and he didn't want to starve another moment.

Pei Jin's hands gripped Yan Shi Ning's waist and he entered deep inside her. Her eyes narrowed, she relaxed her body, wrapped her arms around his neck and bit his shoulder.

Pei Jin savored the sensation of being deep inside Yan Shi Ning.

'Shi Ning, I kept my promise and let you bite me,' Pei Jin teased. He nibbled Yan Shi Ning's earlobe and whispered in her ear. 'Shi Ning, you're so tight. It feels good to be inside you and have you bite me.'

Yan Shi Ning wrapped her legs tight around Pei Jin's waist. Her body was sweetly tormented by his sweet whispers and his deep thrusts. She felt like she blinked, her body trembled and tightened.

Pei Jin felt Yan Shi Ning's body tightened even more. He was careful not to put pressure on her stomach but he still needed release.

'Shi Ning, let's change the position,' Pei Jin whispered.

Yan Shi Ning's upper body fell back on the bed. Pei Jin straddled her thighs, he withdrew and thrust hard inside her.

'Too deep...' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know if she was crying tears from too much pain or pleasure.

Pei Jin increased his body strokes while thinking about stealing forbidden books in the palace to find other positions to eat Yan Shi Ning without putting pressure on her stomach.

That night Yan Shi Ning drifted in and out of consciousness while Pei Jin



satisfied his three month famine. After a long time he released semen inside her and he used her undergarments to clean her inner thighs. Then he hugged her, closed his satisfied eyes and napped.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know when she fell asleep but she dreamt a vivid dream.

'You old AH!' Yan Shi Ning cursed in her sleep. 'If you dare force him to marry another woman then you won't have another grandchild!'

Pei Jin heard Yan Shi Ning's loud murmurs and after he realised who she was calling old AH, he laughed.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Four (Part 1)

***Related***

## part 2



### Chapter Fifty-Four (Part 2 of 2)

An imperial guard reported the crown prince's death to the empress.

The imperial guard gave the empress the crown prince's clothes they found on his dead body and left the empress' chamber.

The empress hugged her son's clothes and cried pitifully. She cursed Consort Mu and Pei Zhang until she lost consciousness.

The emperor visited the empress after she woke up and he ordered an imperial physician to sedate her.

The imperial physician followed the emperor's order and left the chamber.

The emperor returned to his chamber and sobbed.

Even after the empress was sedated she couldn't sleep peacefully. She was startled awake by familiar voices.

'Imperial mother, status, power and money will turn to smoke... your heart doesn't need to waste energy about smoke... everything will turn to smoke... it's better to let go of swords to free the heart... pay with your life... retribution...'  
Bei Dou taunted the empress.

'Who's there?' the empress asked.

The empress looked in four directions until she saw a tall masked figure.

‘Are you human or a demon?’ the empress asked. ‘Imperial guard!’

‘You don’t need to scream,’ Bei Dou said. ‘Everyone around you is dead.’

‘Who are you?’ the empress asked. ‘What do you want?’

‘I’m a demon... I’m here to take your life... you killed many people... you need to die,’ Bei Dou said and pulled out a sword. ‘You’re familiar with his sword. That year you gave it to my father... I love it and brought it here to escort you to hell.’

‘You’re from the Thinh Household,’ the empress said.

‘I’m not human... I’m a demon,’ Bei Dou said and pointed the sword in the empress’ direction. ‘Come here, you killed too many people. They’re all waiting for you in hell, everyone from the Thinh Household, Consort Chen and her child.’

‘Consort Chen and her child?’ the empress asked confusedly.

‘That’s right,’ Bei Dou said. ‘You killed all of them. They’re all waiting for you.’

‘I didn’t kill Consort Chen and her child!’ the empress cried out.

‘If it wasn’t you then who else would kill them?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘It was...’ the empress said. After her panic waned she looked closely at the tall masked figure. ‘You’re not a demon, you’re a human! What do you want?’

Bei Dou jabbed his sword at the empress’ throat. ‘I’m here to take your life!’

‘Did you kill the crown prince?’ the empress asked.

‘The truth is he’s still alive,’ Bei Dou said.

The empress’ grieving heart felt hope.

‘Whether your son lives or dies depends on you,’ Bei Dou said.

‘What are you implying?’ the empress asked.

‘If you love your son then exchange your life for your son’s life,’ Bei Dou said. ‘I’ll spare your son’s life if you kill yourself.’

‘How can I believe your words alone?’ the empress asked. ‘Let me see my son first.’

Bei Dou pulled out a small chest and threw it at the empress.

The empress opened the small chest and saw two fingers and on one finger was the ring that she gave her son.

‘Do you need me to cut him into pieces for you to see before you kill yourself?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘No!’ the empress said. ‘This is good enough. I believe you.’

The empress looked at her son’s fingers and cried.

‘You have three days,’ Bei Dou said. ‘If I don’t hear news of your death then you’ll see your son’s arm. Think about your decision carefully. If you die, your son can’t be the crown prince but he can live.’

‘Are you Pei Zhang’s servant?’ the empress asked.

‘Compared to your useless son seventh prince is more suitable to sit on the throne,’ Bei said and left the empress’ chamber.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Four (Part 2 of 2)

***Related***

# Fifty-Five



## Chapter Fifty-Five

The empress and the crown prince died the same year and winter season.

While everyone in the palace were grieving for the empress and the crown prince's deaths, Consort Mu's imperial physician, Gentleman Zheng was sent to examine Yan Shi Ning at Pei Jin's manor.

'Gentleman Zheng, you can call me Xiao Zai,' Xiao Zai said. 'I waited a long time for your arrival. Why are you wearing thin clothes? What if you get a chest infection? Gentleman Zheng, follow me to ninth prince's wife's chamber.'

Gentleman Zheng thought Xiao Zai was friendly like Pei Jin. Everyone else treated him kindly too like they owed him a hundred silver taels.

Inside the chamber the incense fragrance made Gentleman Zheng feel relaxed and he knew a master physician had brewed the incense fragrance. He heard rumors about a master physician living in Pei Jin's manor and he was happy to finally meet Bei Dou. But he didn't expect Bei Dou was a young man with a cold face.

Bei Dou only glanced once at Gentleman Zheng.

Gentleman Zheng sat on a chair in front of the bed hidden by a beaded curtain.

‘Ninth prince’s wife, please give me your arm,’ Gentleman Zheng said.

Gentleman Zheng heard a cough then an arm appeared through the beaded curtain.

‘Ninth prince’s wife has a weak pulse,’ Gentleman Zheng said. ‘She has been ill with a chest infection for a long period. I’ll give a maid a list of herbs to buy for ninth prince’s wife. After she drinks the remedy between three to five days her body will improve.’

Pei Jin sighed in relief, passed Gentleman Zheng a paper note of one hundred silver taels and Gentleman Zheng left the manor.

Later at the palace Gentleman Zheng reported that Yan Shi Ning had a chest infection to Consort Mu and Pei Zhang.

‘My speculation was wrong,’ Consort Mu said.

‘It’s good she’s not pregnant,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Today is a good day. Both tenth brother and the empress are gone. Anyone left that choose to oppose me will be easily turned to dust.’

Consort Mu was also happy. The empress who she battled for decades was finally dead.

‘I didn’t expect she would kill herself,’ Consort Mu said. ‘I thought she would have wanted to kill us to avenge her son’s death before she died.’

‘The empress had high expectations of tenth brother,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Her life dream dissolved in the ocean so it’s understandable she would kill herself. Mother, didn’t you hear how the empress was hysterical after she found out about tenth brother’s death?’

‘Xiao Zheng, the truth is the empress is a fool like Kang Hua,’ Consort Mu said. ‘The empress was only able to survive many years in the palace because she had a powerful family supporting her.’

‘Mother, now our rivals that need to die have died and everyone else has aged,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘The young are incompetent and easily to defeat. Now that the empress and the crown prince are gone, their supporters aren’t foolish

and will resign like everyone at Guo Huang's manor. Mother, why do you think Guo Huang lost power that year?'

'The higher Guo Huang was the lower he fell,' Consort Mu said.

'Mother, I understand,' Pei Zhang said.

'Today our biggest rivals are gone and your ninth brother has no heir,' Consort Mu said. 'The right opportunity for you to be crown prince will arrive soon.'

At Pei Jin's manor the beaded curtains were parted the moment Gentleman Zheng left.

On the bed Yan Shi Ning and Xiao Tu were laying side by side and smiling cheekily.

Yan Shi Ning got out of the bed and smiled at Pei Jin. 'How was the performance?'

Pei Jin helped Yan Shi Ning stand. 'Of course it was a convincing performance. This time we need to thank Xiao Tu.'

Xiao Tu got out of the bed and was about to say there was no need to thank her but Bei Dou scoffed loudly.

'What is there to scoff about?' Pei Jin asked Bei Dou.

Bei Dou looked at Xiao Tu's wrist and he scoffed. How dare that old man Zheng touch Xiao Tu's wrist even though a thin handkerchief covered her wrist. He scoffed because he didn't get to touch Xiao Tu's wrist yet.

Yan Shi Ning noticed Bei Dou's attention was solely focused on Xiao Tu.

'It's been a long time since there's been something to celebrate at the manor,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin understood Yan Shi Ning's words and he saw Bei Dou relaxed.

'Bei Dou, you're not young anymore,' Pei Jin said. 'Xiao Tu is sixteen years old... a good age to marry... Shi Ning, is there an auspicious day soon?'

'What auspicious day?' Yan Shi Ning said. 'If they're happy then any day is an auspicious day.'

'Shi Ning is right,' Pei Jin said. 'Tomorrow is an auspicious day if Bei Dou is



happy.'

Bei Dou looked out the window like he wasn't happy in front of the married pair who was mocking him. Then Bei Dou looked at Xiao Tu, she looked calm so he looked out the window again.

'It appears Gentleman Bei isn't happy,' Pei Jin teased. 'What do we do now?'

'Gentleman Bei isn't unhappy,' Xiao Tu said.

'How do you know he isn't unhappy?' Pei Jin asked.

'When Gentleman Bei's ears are red it means he's happy,' Xiao Tu said.

'Gentleman Bei's ears are red.'

Bei Dou was speechless like trouble flew past his head.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning saw Bei Dou's red ears and they smiled.

'Then tomorrow is an auspicious day for a wedding day,' Pei Jin said.

'But it's a grieving period for the empress and the crown prince's deaths,' Xiao Tu said. 'No one is allowed to marry.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning stopped smiling while Bei Dou felt trouble flew past his head again.

'But we can secretly marry... and not let outsiders know...' Xiao Tu said.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning both laughed because Bei Dou's ears turned a shade of red brighter.

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### **Short Side Story Four**

Four possible scenarios that could happen after Bei Dou and Xiao Tu's wedding ceremony: Scenario One – Bei Dou and Xiao Tu sat on a bed together and their faces were flushed red. Bei Dou initiated a kiss and they both fell onto the bed... it was a misty night... the following day...

Scenario Two – Xiao Tu stripped Bei Dou's clothes and bound him. She held incense sticks in one hand and a whip in the other hand and she smiled at him.

Bei Dou's eyes widened and he mumbled, 'No need... kiss... no need...'



Scenario Three – On Bei Dou and Xiao Tu’s wedding night...

Bei Dou: Tonight’s our wedding night.

Xiao Tu: Yes.

Bei Dou: We should sleep early tonight.

Xiao Tu: Yes.

A while later a steady snore was heard in their chamber.

Scenario Four – On Bei Dou and Xiao Tu’s wedding day everyone at the gentle ninth prince’s manor were happy the whole day. The following day the atmosphere was good...

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End of Chapter Fifty-Five

***Related***

## Fifty-Six



### Chapter Fifty-Six

A solemn atmosphere shrouded the imperial city.

Everyone at Pei Jin's manor hid their joy.

There were no red flowers, no firecrackers and no red wedding decorations. Everyone at Pei Jin's manor only changed into new clothes and ate a simple wedding banquet together.

In the evening Bei Dou and Xiao Tu were escorted to their chamber.

When Bei Dou was about to step into the chamber, Pei Jin pulled him back.

'Do you know how to do it?' Pei Jin asked softly.

Pei Jin feared the innocent Bei Dou wouldn't know how to do it.

'Don't forget I'm a physician,' Bei Dou said.

'I wish you a happy night!' Pei Jin said.

‘Um,’ Bei Dou said.

Bei Dou stepped into the chamber but Pei Jin pulled him back again.

‘Are you certain you understand what to do?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou looked suspiciously at Pei Jin then Bei Dou strode into the chamber.

Bei Dou carefully checked the windows and doors were locked properly then he stepped toward the bed.

Bei Dou’s heart pounded the moment he saw the veiled Xiao Tu on the bed. He waited for his heart to calm a little then he sat on the bed next to her and he stared at the floor for a while.

Bei Dou’s hands began fiddling. He didn’t know what to do next because it wasn’t written in the medical books that he studied.

Xiao Tu slowly moved closer toward Bei Dou and she stretched out her hand in the direction of his hand. He thought she was a daring demoness and his hesitations disappeared. He pushed her onto the bed and pulled off her red veil... except the face of the person below his body wasn’t Xiao Tu!

‘Ah!’ Xiao Zai cried out.

Pei Jin kicked open the locked door, entered the chamber and saw Xiao Zai was crying.

‘Ninth prince, save me!’ Xiao Zai begged.

A while later Xiao Zai was exchanged for Xiao Tu and Bei Dou finally calmed down a little. But Bei Dou still glared at Pei Jin like Pei Jin was his biggest enemy.

Pei Jin was smiling because Bei Dou tasted what it was like to have other people interfere during a good night.

‘It’s not that I didn’t let you do it,’ Pei Jin teased. ‘But it wasn’t the right time to do it.’

Pei Jin silently cursed Bei Dou, ‘you dare to lie I needed to wait a year!’

Bei Dou didn’t want to admit that he shouldn’t have teased Pei Jin in the past.

Pei Jin waited for Bei Dou to close the door then he turned around to look at Xiao Zai.

‘Ninth prince, you’re too cruel,’ Xiao Zai sulked. ‘What happens if Gentleman Bei didn’t take off the veil but continued to undress me?’

Pei Jin patted Xiao Zai’s shoulder. ‘Then you can enjoy being undressed and what happens afterward.’

Xiao Zai was speechless at Pei Jin’s way of comforting another person.

Inside the chamber Bei Dou was satisfied it was Xiao Tu on the bed next to him. But he didn’t know what to do next.

‘Tonight is our wedding night,’ Bei Dou said.

‘Yes,’ Xiao Tu said.

‘We should sleep early tonight,’ Bei Dou said.

‘Yes,’ Xiao Tu said.

Xiao Tu began to take off her clothes.

Bei Dou panicked. ‘Xiao Tu, what are you doing?’

‘Gentleman Bei, don’t you take off your clothes before you sleep?’ Xiao Tu asked calmly.

Bei Dou was speechless.

Bei Dou and Xiao Tu took off their clothes and they laid straight under the same blanket.

Bei Dou smelt Xiao Tu’s body scent and his body stiffened. He recited in his head one hundred times that a spring night was more precious than thousands of silver taels.

Bei Dou dared to look at Xiao Tu’s face of anticipation.

‘Gentleman Bei, you can’t sleep?’ Xiao Tu asked.

‘Um,’ Bei Dou said.

Bei Dou didn’t know why his body felt hot.

Xiao Tu widened her eyes. ‘Then we should have a wedding night.’

Bei Dou was startled speechless. He thought Xiao Tu was a direct woman.

Xiao Tu leaned her face closer to Bei Dou's face.

Xiao Tu was only wearing her thin undergarments. If Bei Dou looked down then he could see her bare slender legs and her soft chest, his whole body stiffened. Her lips touched his lips and his soul flew away.

In that moment Bei Dou heard strange thump noises beneath the bed. He turned his head around and saw Xiao Hui got out from underneath the bed.

Xiao Hui stood and brushed dust off his clothes. 'Ninth prince asked me to come here to tell you when it's the middle of the tiger hour you should sleep early.'

Xiao Hui unlocked the window and escaped the chamber before Bei Dou could slice him into pieces.

Bei Dou unlocked the door and he saw Pei Jin was smiling brightly.

'Gentleman Bei, it's late,' Pei Jin said. 'What are you doing here?'

'Pei-Jin!' Bei Dou said through gritted teeth.

'Gentleman Bei, it's your wedding night,' Pei Jin said. 'You don't need to be this stern.'

Pei Jin looked carefully at the sword in Bei Dou's hand then he ran away.

'Gentleman Bei, if you want to say anything then you can say it calmly,' Pei Jin said. 'Don't ruin your wedding night by wielding a sword.'

Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai hid behind a wall nearby and they quietly watched Pei Jin who was being chased by the sword wielding Bei Dou.

'Should we help ninth prince?' Xiao Hui asked.

'Why should I help ninth prince?' Xiao Zai asked. 'If it wasn't ninth prince who persuaded me to tease Gentleman Bei then I wouldn't be tossed outside the chamber. My bottom is still numb... Xiao Hui my bottom hurts. Can you help me massage my bottom?'

'Do you want to die?' Xiao Hui asked.

'Confess, why did you agree to help ninth prince tease Gentleman Bei?' Xiao Zai asked.

Xiao Hui coughed. 'The moon tonight is bright and full!'

Xiao Zai looked up at the moon. 'What bright full moon? It's a new moon!'

Xiao Hui would never confess Pei Jin promised he wouldn't separate him and Xiao Zai if he helped Pei Jin tease Bei Dou.

Inside the chamber, Bei Dou checked everywhere thoroughly and he returned to the bed. But he heard Xiao Tu's steady snoring!

Bei Dou tossed and turned on the bed. What wedding night? His wife was happily sleeping while he couldn't sleep.

A while later Bei Dou saw Xiao Tu was about to wake up so he laid still and closed his eyes. But he didn't hear any sounds.

'Gentleman Bei, you can't sleep?' Xiao Tu asked.

'No,' Bei Dou said.

'Do you want to have a wedding night?' Xiao Tu asked.

Bei Dou widened his eyes. 'Um'

Xiao Tu nodded and leaned her face closer to Bei Dou's face.

Bei Dou held Xiao Tu's shoulders. 'Let me.'

Xiao Tu obediently laid on the bed. 'Ninth prince's wife said there's a possibility you don't know what to do and she advised me to take the initiative.'

Bei Dou was frustrated why others thought he didn't know what to do. He gently licked Xiao Tu's soft and fragrant lips.

Xiao Tu opened her eyes. 'Gentleman Bei, do you know how to kiss?'

Bei Dou was confused, he thought he was kissing Xiao Tu's lips.

'Gentleman Bei, you need to insert your tongue inside my mouth,' Xiao Tu said.

Xiao Tu pulled Bei Dou's neck down, she kissed him and inserted her tongue inside his mouth.

'Like this,' Xiao Tu said.

'Xiao Tu, who taught you?' Bei Dou asked.

‘Ninth prince’s wife taught me,’ Xiao Tu said.

Bei Dou almost fell off the bed. The Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning pair was capable of being concerned about anything!

Bei Dou dismissed thoughts about the rotten pair. His thoughts were consumed by Xiao Tu’s sweet mouth, taking off her undergarments and her soft naked body.

Bei Dou sucked Xiao Tu’s breasts like a newborn drinking milk.

‘Gentleman Bei, be gentle... it hurts,’ Xiao Tu said.

Bei Dou raised his head and kissed Xiao Tu’s lips. He positioned himself between her legs but no matter how he pushed himself forward to death, he couldn’t enter inside her.

Bei Dou knew Xiao Tu was in pain but he didn’t stop pushing himself forward. He didn’t know why he couldn’t enter inside her like what was written in the medical books.

Outside the chamber Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were concerned about the lack of sounds.

‘Pei Jin, do you think he knows what to do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Indeed he doesn’t know what to do,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Do you need to call him outside to give him instructions?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘No, it’s late,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Let’s go back to our chamber.’

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End of Chapter Fifty-Six

***Related***



# Fifty-Seven



## Chapter Fifty-Seven

The morning after Bei Dou and Xiao Tu's wedding.

Bei Dou rolled around from night to dawn and finally he could eat Xiao Tu.

Pei Jin successfully ate Yan Shi Ning.

That morning Yan Shi Ning woke up and saw Pei Jin staring sadly at the ceiling. She knocked her head on his arm. 'Pei Jin, what are you thinking?'

'I'm thinking it's been many days and it's the right time for me to see tenth brother,' Pei Jin said.

'You should go,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Shi Ning, do you want to accompany me?' Pei Jin asked.

'I can go outside?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning was three months pregnant and her stomach was round. If she walked outside the manor then her pregnancy wouldn't be a secret anymore.

'Shi Ning, you've been locked at home for months,' Pei Jin said. 'Don't you



want to go outside?’

‘I do want to go outside but... I decided I want to continue staying home,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin understood Yan Shi Ning didn’t want to risk losing their child and he held her hand. ‘Shi Ning, I’ve made you worried.’

‘It’s enough that you know,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Pei Jin, on the way home remember to buy braised trotters and soft dates at Guo Fu for me.’

Yan Shi Ning licked her lips and felt hungry.

‘Shi Ning, recently you’ve been craving for soft food,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Um, is something wrong with my cravings?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Elders say if a pregnant woman is carrying a boy then she’ll crave soft food,’ Pei Jin said. He rubbed Yan Shi Ning’s stomach. ‘Do you think our child is a boy?’

Yan Shi Ning kicked Pei Jin, his hands were rubbing past her stomach. ‘Pei Jin, take your hands away.’

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning, dressed and unwillingly left the chamber. He was happy to eat Yan Shi Ning but he regretted he couldn’t eat her as often as he did before she was pregnant.

West of the imperial city there was a busy shop owned by Gentleman Su Ci. He stood at the front of the shop and greeted customers. He grinned after he saw Pei Jin stepped out of a horse carriage.

‘Ninth prince, what wind brought you here?’ Su Ci asked. ‘Someone bring the rare tea to ninth prince!’

‘Gentleman Su Ci, you’re too generous,’ Pei Jin praised. ‘I heard you have a rare jade bracelet at your shop. I came here because I’m interested in seeing the rare jade bracelet.’

‘Ninth prince, I understand,’ Su Ci said. ‘Please come inside. We can drink tea and talk.’

‘Sorry for troubling Gentleman Su Ci,’ Pei Jin said and walked into the shop.

The rich young gentleman customers who were inside the shop gossiped about

Pei Jin.

‘Ninth prince is kind and gentle as rumored,’ the first young man said. ‘A while ago I heard he bought a rare pair of jade bracelets for his wife.’

‘You don’t know how much ninth prince dotes on his wife,’ the second young man said. ‘To ninth prince gold and silver can’t compare to a beauty’s smile.’

‘What about you?’ the first young man asked. ‘Aren’t you going to buy this ring? It’s only five hundred silver taels. Are you not buying it because your heart will miss the silver taels?’

‘No, I have selective vision!’ the second young man said. ‘Fu Wu, are there other rings similar to this ring?’

Su Ci led Pei Jin into a private room.

‘Heavens, I’m begging ninth prince to take the jade away,’ Su Ci said. ‘You caused me to lose peaceful sleep by keeping the jade here.’

‘Your cheeks look a healthy pink and you look livelier than in the past,’ Pei Jin said.

‘It’s an act!’ Su Ci said.

‘Show me the jade,’ Pei Jin said.

Su Ci obediently pushed a hidden clay ornament and exposed a secret passageway through a wall.

Pei Jin looked down at the spacious descending stairway. ‘It’s impressive.’

Su Ci led Pei Jin down the stairs and to a locked door that had light shining through the gaps of the door.

‘He’s inside,’ Su Ci said. ‘I’ll be guarding and waiting for you outside.’

‘Um, is there anything else?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘It’s better if you see him yourself,’ Su Ci said.

Pei Jin thought it wasn’t good news. He watched Su Ci walked upstairs then he unlocked the door.

Inside the room Pei Lam’s hair was messy, his face was pale and he sat

gloomily at a table.

‘Ninth brother,’ Pei Lam said.

Pei Jin’s back turned cold to see Pei Lam’s disturbing calmness as though Pei Lam predicted his visit.

Pei Lam stared at the barricaded window. ‘I’ve been asking myself when ninth brother would visit me. I didn’t think ninth brother would visit this soon. Is it twelve or thirteen days... ninth brother, look at this place. It’s hard to see if it’s night or day.’

Pei Jin understood Su Ci’s words, Pei Lam was mumbling to himself.

‘How did you know it was me?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Lam turned around and looked at Pei Jin. ‘Ninth prince, what’s scaring you?’

Pei Jin didn’t know why Pei Lam’s eyes looked soulless.

‘Ninth brother, you don’t need to be scared,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I’m your captive and I can’t do anything to harm you. Ninth brother, look at me. Even if you gave me a sword I still wouldn’t be able to do anything.’

Pei Jin looked at Pei Lam’s two missing fingers and he shivered. He didn’t expect saying to Bei Dou that he could deal with the empress and Pei Lam would lead to Bei Dou cutting off two of Pei Lam’s fingers and using it to force the empress to kill herself.

‘Ninth brother, why did you cut off two of my fingers?’ Pei Lam asked. ‘I thought about why for many days. But after I heard the ringing sounds of funeral bells I understood why. Ninth brother, is my imperial mother dead?’

Pei Jin was startled to see Pei Lam calmly treated the empress’ death as something trivial.

‘It’s good that she’s dead,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I’m not the crown prince anymore, she wouldn’t have survived much longer in the palace. Imperial mother had lived a tiring life. The sooner she closes her eyes the sooner she can rest. Death is an escape for her.’

Pei Jin couldn’t believe it was the Pei Lam he knew in the past. He didn’t know

how a lively Pei Lam could say such despairing thoughts.

‘Is that why you killed Yan Shi Ting?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Shi Ting...’ Pei Lam asked. He vaguely remembered Yan Shi Ting. ‘I killed her. She lived a life of suffering. It’s better for her to die.’

Pei Lam looked down at his hands. ‘I used these two hands to choke her to death and pushed her down the well. It’s an unforgiveable crime... but it was worth freeing Shi Ting.’

Pei Jin didn’t know how he could understand Pei Lam’s eerie indifference.

‘Ninth brother, do you think I’m too cruel?’ Pei Lam asked. ‘Ninth brother, did you expect I’m capable of being this cruel?’

Pei Jin didn’t want to admit he suspected Pei Lam was possessed by a demon.

‘Ninth brother, the truth is there’s no one that isn’t cruel,’ Pei Lam said.

‘What are you implying?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Ninth brother, we’re all cruel,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I killed Yan Shi Ting. But ninth brother, ninth sister and everyone else caused her to become insane. Ninth brother, who do you think is crueller?’

Pei Jin didn’t know what to say.

‘Ninth brother, I only wanted to leave,’ Pei Lam said. ‘I wanted to escape my cage. Ninth brother, why did you detain me?’

‘You truly want to leave?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘If I didn’t want to leave then why did I request many times to take my crown position away?’ Pei Lam asked. ‘Why did I fake my own death? It’s a pity ninth brother ruined everything.’

‘You don’t want to be the crown prince?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘This imperial city is only dust eating people,’ Pei Lam said.

‘If your intention was to leave then why did you need to warn imperial father about me?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Warn imperial father...’ Pei Lam asked. ‘It appears Wang Fu Mu is ninth

brother's ally.'

Pei Jin was impressed by Pei Lam's intelligence.

'Ninth brother, you win!' Pei Lam said.

'Do you want me to die?' Pei Jin asked.

'No,' Pei Lam said.

Pei Lam didn't know why he warned their father. Did he wanted to harm Pei Jin? But he thought Pei Jin was more suited to sit on the throne than Pei Zhang. If he decided to let go of his crown position... why did he need to warn their father?

Pei Lam thought about his father's disappointment and hurt. Perhaps he wanted to compensate his father's pain. His father couldn't see through Pei Jin. So if he warned his father about Pei Jin then his father didn't need to be troubled about Pei Jin.

'Pei Lam, do you think your life is full of unbearable sufferings?' Pei Jin asked. 'Do you think you can only escape if you leave? Do you think everyone close to you suffered too and they can only escape if they die?'

Pei Lam nodded his head.

'Pei Lam, why is it that everyone else that suffered can only escape if they die?' Pei Jin asked. 'Yet you suffered too but don't think you need to die to escape.'

Pei Jin grabbed Pei Lam's collar, teared Pei Lam's robes opened and exposed Pei Lam's chest scar.

'Ninth brother, what are you doing?' Pei Lam asked.

'Why didn't you stab your heart a little deeper?' Pei Jin asked. 'Is it because you didn't want to die? Is it because you're scared of death?'

Pei Jin pushed Pei Lam onto the bed and looked down at Pei Lam.

'Pei Lam, do you think you're clean and innocent?' Pei Jin asked. 'The truth is you're too dirty! You think you're righteous. Yet you're scared of death and too deceitful. If you didn't want to become the emperor then you should have said you didn't want to before you became the crown prince. If you didn't want to

marry Yan Shi Ting then you should have kept your distance from her at the start and not give her hope. For your own gains, you used others. Do you think your actions are righteous? Pei Lam, you don't need to act like this, it's too ugly.'

In Pei Lam's world, he was the only good and beautiful person inside his world. He thought he didn't care about the grievances of the outside world but he didn't expect the world he built for himself was too weak. Pei Jin only said a few words to him and his world turned to dust. He wasn't good and beautiful as he thought so his world was no longer good and beautiful. He was a bad person so he had built an ugly world.

'Pei Lam, you've only stepped on others' hopes and good intentions,' Pei Jin said. 'You've hurt the people who supported you for what you call freedom and escape. Do you know why your imperial mother died? She wanted you to stay alive so she killed herself. The palace isn't a cage, it's not dust but you perceived it as a cage to justify your cruel actions in the past.'

Pei Lam fell into a hopeless state.

'If you think the palace is a scary place then this place doesn't have any scary battles,' Pei Jin said. 'You can be happy on your own here.'

Pei Jin left the room and he didn't look back at the soulless Pei Lam.

Pei Lam awoken from his dark thoughts after he heard the sound of the door lock.

'Let me out!' Pei Lam cried out. 'You don't need to trap me here!'

Pei Lam yelled, kicked and punched the door but there was no reply outside the door.

The silence was killing Pei Lam.

'You don't need to trap me here... you can kill me but you don't need to trap me here...' Pei Lam mumbled.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Seven

***Related***

# Fifty-Eight



## Chapter Fifty-Eight

Pei Jin stood outside Pei Lam's room.

Pei Jin's back was sweaty. He heard Pei Lam yelled hysterically and Pei Lam's mumbles to himself. Pei Jin didn't know why Pei Lam became like that. Was it because Pei Lam was too intelligent and punctured a brain nerve?

Pei Jin couldn't answer Pei Lam, who was crueller? Was it true Yan Shi Ting would suffer less if she died? But after everything Pei Lam had done, Pei Lam lost to himself.

Pei Jin left Su Ci's shop. On the way home a messenger delivered a message to Pei Jin from Su Ci, Pei Lam killed himself. Pei Jin felt remorseful he had indirectly caused Pei Lam to shed fresh blood.

While Pei Jin was away from home, a maid rushed into Yan Shi Ning's chamber.

'Mistress, a few women from Huang Guo's manor are here to see you,' the maid said.

Yan Shi Ning was eating pecans when the maid delivered bad news. She didn't know what Huang Guo was scheming, but she changed into a loose dress to protect hers and Pei Jin's child.

Yan Shi Ning asked the maid to escort the women into her chamber.

The maid led the women into Yan Shi Ning's chamber and poured tea.

'Shi Ning, I heard you've been ill,' second aunt said. 'I wanted to visit you

earlier but I heard you were bedridden. Two days ago, I heard you've recovered so I came to visit you today.'

Although Yan Shi Ning had stayed home for many months, she didn't forget how insincere Huang Guo's daughter-in-laws were.

'Aunts, forgive me for making everyone worried,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Second sister, I remembered you brought a bracelet for Shi Ting,' third aunt said.

'Third sister, thank you for reminding me,' second aunt said. She pulled out a pink jade bracelet and gave it to Yan Shi Ning. 'Shi Ning this is for you. I think the colour suits you.'

Yan Shi Ning couldn't refuse and wore the bracelet. She admitted it was a beautiful bracelet with a sweet scent.

'Second sister, it's a beautiful bracelet,' third aunt praised. 'Second sister, you're too frugal. Last time I wanted to wear it but you didn't let me... but why does it have a sweet scent... isn't this a che fragrance?'

Yan Shi Ning's face paled and she took off the bracelet, che fragrances were used to abort children.

'Third sister, is it a che fragrance?' second aunt asked. 'I didn't know. I only thought it was a sweet scent... Shi Ning, forgive my ignorance...'

Yan Shi Ning was scared to death but she spoke calmly. 'Second aunt, it isn't your fault. You didn't know.'

Yan Shi Ning assessed the women who hid their intentions well.

The women praised Yan Shi Ning's dress and she couldn't avoid them purposely touching her waist. Although her stomach was only slightly round, it was still rounder than before she was pregnant.

'Shi Ning, I noticed you've been eating a lot of soft food,' second aunt said. 'Shi Ning, are you pregnant? If you're pregnant you should share the good news with your aunts.'

'Of course,' Yan Shi Ning said.



Yan Shi Ning was certain the women visited her to see if she was pregnant but she didn't know why.

Yan Shi Ning asked the maid to escort the women to their horse carriage and she waited for Pei Jin's return.

A while later Pei Jin returned to the manor and found Yan Shi Ning in deep thought in their chamber.

'Wife, are you worried about something or are you missing your husband?' Pei Jin asked.

'Earlier Huang Guo's daughter-in-laws came to visit me,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Why did they come?' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin sat on the bed and pulled Yan Shi Ning onto his lap. There were maids cleaning in their chamber so she protested but he hugged her and didn't let her go.

Luckily the maids kept their eyes on the floor and quickly left the chamber.

'Pei Jin, don't forget you're gentle ninth prince,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Why are you more of a scoundrel by the day?'

Pei Jin rubbed his face on Yan Shi Ning's neck and spoke in a sad tone. 'Shi Ning, Pei Lam died.'

Yan Shi Ning sat still on Pei Jin's lap.

'Pei Lam broke a teapot and slit his throat,' Pei Jin said. 'When someone discovered what happened it was too late. Pei Lam lost too much blood and his last words were... it's clean red blood, finally I've escaped...' Pei Jin said.

In front of others Pei Jin acted like he was happy Pei Lam died. He could only show how guilty and sad he felt in front of Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning understood Pei Jin's feelings. She knew Pei Jin didn't kill Pei Lam but in Pei Jin's heart he blamed himself for Pei Lam's death.

Yan Shi Ning turned around and wrapped her arms around Pei Jin's neck. He kissed her forehead and kissed her lips for a while.

'Wife, do you want to do it in the middle of the day with your husband?' Pei Jin

asked.

‘Do you want to die?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Wife, it appears you’ve learned bad habits from Xiao Hui,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I think I have to change your personal guards. You only know how to follow their bad habits. Soon you’ll learn to eavesdrop well like Xiao Zai.’

‘Pei Jin, don’t change my personal guards,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai are amusing guards.’

‘Alright,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Shi Ning, you didn’t tell me why Huang Guo’s daughter-in-laws came to visit you.’

‘I think they came to see if I’m pregnant,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Perhaps I’ve given away the secret about our child.’

Pei Jin listened to Yan Shi Ning recount about the bracelet and how the women behaved strangely.

‘What does Huang Guo want?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘The empress is dead. He should be satisfied Consort Chen’s death is avenged.’

‘Will it be troublesome if he knows I’m pregnant?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I’m worried our peaceful days are over,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What should we do?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘We’ll silently follow them and deal with them at the right opportunity,’ Pei Jin said.

In the palace Wang Fu Mu announced the emperor’s arrival in the imperial court.

The court officials who supported Pei Zhang were surprised to see why Huang Guo was at the palace.

The emperor sat on his throne, his head and heart was plagued with the deaths of the empress and his tenth son.

‘Your majesty, I have something important to report,’ Official Zai Ci said.

‘What is it?’ the emperor asked.

Wang Fu Mu gave the emperor the petition Official Zai Ci prepared.

‘Your majesty, I and many other court officials recommend seventh prince to become the crown prince,’ Official Zai Ci said.

The emperor hid his displeasure. He couldn’t bring his tenth son back to life but he was dissatisfied with his seventh son’s black heart.

‘Huang Guo, what do you think?’ the emperor asked.

‘Your majesty, I disagree,’ Huang Guo said.

Everyone was silent and thought Huang Guo was daring to openly oppose Pei Zhang.

‘Your majesty, I believe ninth prince is more suitable to be the crown prince,’ Huang Guo said.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Eight

***Related***

# Fifty-Nine



## Chapter Fifty-Nine

The emperor listened to Huang Guo's opinion.

'Ninth prince is intelligent, humble and patient,' Huang Guo praised. 'That year in Xuan Qing, he worked tirelessly day and night to find ways to prevent severe floods and saved the livelihoods of many citizens. But he humbly gave the credit to others. In Southern Jiang, his strategies helped to subdue the rebels. Everyone here can clearly see that ninth prince is a selfless and diligent person.'

The other court officials thought Pei Jin deserved Huang Guo's praises. In the past they didn't acknowledge Pei Jin's achievements because they knew the emperor didn't favor Pei Jin.

The emperor's expression darkened. No one dared to dispute Huang Guo's words. It implied everyone hid the extent of his ninth son's contributions to the Dian Kingdom and his court officials deceived him!

'Everyone here also knows ninth prince is a gentle and kind person,' Huang Guo said. 'He is respectful and compassionate toward citizens. If he becomes the crown prince, it'll be a blessing for all the citizens.'

The court officials who supported the empress and Pei Zhang kowtowed in

front of the emperor and agreed with Huang Guo's recommendation to make Pei Jin the crown prince. After the empress and Pei Lam died, they were scared Consort Mu and Pei Zhang would eliminate them. So Huang Guo's words gave them a chance to live.

'Your majesty, seventh prince is the most suitable candidate to be the crown prince,' Official Zai Ci said. 'Your majesty, you also need to consider your grandchildren.'

'Your majesty, I agree your majesty should consider your grandchildren,' Huang Guo said.

'Huang Guo, what are you saying?' the emperor asked.

'Congratulations your majesty,' Huang Guo said. 'In a few months your majesty will have a grandson.'

'Huang Guo, why are you the only one congratulating me?' the emperor asked.

'Recently my daughter-in-laws visited ninth prince's wife and accidentally found out ninth prince's wife is pregnant,' Huang Guo said.

'Truly?' the emperor asked.

'Your majesty, if you don't believe me then your majesty can send your imperial physicians to examine ninth prince's wife,' Huang Guo said.

The emperor wasn't certain if Huang Guo's words were true, but his fingers trembled. He was angry why his ninth son didn't inform about his ninth daughter-in-law's pregnancy.

Pei Zhang was shocked to hear his ninth brother's wife was pregnant. His mother's imperial physician reported that Yan Shi Ning had a chest infection and he knew Gentleman Zheng wouldn't dare lie to him and his mother.

The loud commotion in the imperial court made the emperor angrier. The emperor dismissed everyone and he summoned Official Hu to the imperial calligraphy room.

Inside the imperial calligraphy room the emperor sat on the highest chair and he gave permission for Official Hu to sit.

'Hu, between seventh prince and ninth prince who do you think is more

suitable?’ the emperor asked.

‘Your majesty is wise and knows who is more suitable,’ Official Hu said.

‘I don’t want to hear pleasantries!’ the emperor said. ‘I won’t punish you if you give me your honest opinion.’

‘Your majesty, I believe ninth prince is more suitable,’ Official Hu said.

‘Why?’ the emperor asked.

‘Your majesty, truthfully I’m not close to neither seventh prince nor ninth prince,’ Official Hu said. ‘Your majesty, forgive me for my ignorant thoughts.’

‘Alright,’ the emperor said. ‘You’re free to speak your thoughts.’

‘Your majesty, ninth prince is truly someone who is fair and merciful which makes him more suitable to be the crown prince,’ Official Hu said.

The emperor silently reflected Official Hu’s words. He knew citizens of the Dian Kingdom needed a ruler who was fair and merciful to guide the kingdom through calamities and peaceful periods.

‘I understand,’ the emperor said. ‘Hu you can leave first.’

Official Hu bowed to the emperor and left the imperial calligraphy room.

On the way back to the Hu Manor, Official Hu remembered his daughter’s shame six years ago. That year he and Pei Jin caught his daughter seducing Pei Zhang when his daughter was betrothed to Pei Jin. Pei Jin didn’t expose his daughter’s shame in front of the emperor. If it wasn’t for Pei Jin’s mercy and forgiveness then he would have lost his position in the imperial court six years ago. So he wanted to repay Pei Jin for sparing his reputation.

Official Hu thought his dead daughter was foolish while alive. If his daughter was wise then she would be alive and become the empress. Even though it wasn’t certain Pei Jin would become emperor, he didn’t know why he felt it was inevitable Pei Jin would become emperor. He admitted in the past he didn’t expect the carefree and powerless Pei Jin would one day have many court officials support Pei Jin to become emperor.

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End of Chapter Fifty-Nine

***Related***

# Sixty



## Chapter Sixty

Oblivious to the internal battles between the court officials in the palace, the guards at Pei Jin's manor were competing for grilled meat.

'Why aren't you pushing me higher in the air?' Xiao Zai asked. 'You need to use all your strength otherwise we won't get to eat ninth prince's grilled meat!'

Pei Jin wanted to motivate his lethargic guards during the colder days. He organised competitions like who could jump higher than the wall would be rewarded with grilled meat.

Everyone wanted to eat the delicious grilled meat from Southern Jiang, especially Xiao Zai.



Xiao Hui's arms were tired from supporting Xiao Zai's weight and he used his last strength to push Xiao Zai into the air... Xiao Zai flew over the wall... and landed in front of the emperor.

Xiao Zai thought if he died and Dizang asked him how he died, he would say he jumped too high and landed in the wrong spot.

After the commotion the emperor looked sternly at the people who knelt in front of him. Earlier he was scared to death, he thought an assassin flew over the wall.

'What was everyone doing?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, forgive me,' Pei Jin said. 'Recently the days have been colder. I wanted everyone at the manor to be active. I didn't expect to trouble imperial father. I deserve to die.'

The emperor glanced at the ropes and cuju balls on the ground and he knew Pei Jin wasn't lying. But he couldn't calm his anger until he glanced at Yan Shi Ning who was kneeling too.

'Everyone stand,' the emperor said. He turned around to look at his imperial physicians. 'Hurry and examine ninth prince's wife!'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were surprised to see the emperor but they were frightened after they heard the emperor's order. They looked at each other and realised Huang Guo was the culprit.

The emperor brought six imperial physicians to Pei Jin's manor. Outsiders would have thought Yan Shi Ning had a contagious illness if they didn't suspect she was pregnant.

Pei Jin gave Yan Shi Ning a don't-worry-I'm-here look and she gave him a your-father-is-troublesome look.

While the six imperial physicians examined Yan Shi Ning thoroughly, the emperor assessed everyone at Pei Jin's manor. Afterward he smelt a delicious grilled meat scent and it made him hungry. He didn't have an appetite for many days but the grilled meat also looked appealing.

Pei Jin noticed his father's eyes focused on the grilled meat so he brought a

bowl of grilled meat to his father. 'Imperial father, this grilled meat is delicious.'

Wang Fu Mu inserted a silver needle into the grilled meat and assured the emperor they were safe to eat.

The emperor slowly ate the grilled meat.

The emperor chewed the grilled meat but he didn't say if it tasted delicious or awful.

Pei Jin and Wang Fu Mu didn't know what the emperor was thinking.

'Congratulations your majesty,' the head imperial physician said.

The emperor swallowed the grilled meat and didn't look like he heard the good news.

'Ninth son, follow me,' the emperor said.

Pei Jin followed the emperor into the calligraphy room. The emperor looked at the three portraits on the wall, they were all portraits of Yan Shi Ning. Then the emperor looked at Pei Jin who looked shy to let the emperor find out how much Pei Jin loved Yan Shi Ning.

'Why did you deceive me?' the emperor asked.

Pei Jin knelt in front of his father. 'Imperial father, I wouldn't dare to deceive you.'

'Don't dare?' the emperor asked. 'You've already dared and you can still say you don't dare! Can you say that you don't know your wife is pregnant more than three months?'

Pei Jin silently lowered his head.

'Why did you deceive me?' the emperor asked.

'Because I want to protect imperial father's grandson,' Pei Jin said.

'What are you implying?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, I only want to live a peaceful life but while I'm alive I need to be cautious,' Pei Jin said.

The emperor understood Pei Jin's words. He didn't know who saw Pei Jin as an

eyesore until he remembered the commotion at the palace and suspected who those people were.

‘Who do you need to be cautious of?’ the emperor asked.

‘Imperial father, I don’t know who,’ Pei Jin said.

‘You dare say you don’t know!’ the emperor said.

‘Imperial father, don’t be angry,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Imperial father, I truly don’t know. I was scared since the harvest festival incident. The person behind it still hasn’t been caught.’

The emperor was still troubled about who dared to send assassins into the palace. If he was in Pei Jin’s position then he would be worried about others finding out Yan Shi Ning’s pregnancy too.

‘You can stand and talk,’ the emperor said.

‘Thank you imperial father,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Ninth son, what are you hiding from me?’ the emperor asked.

‘Imperial father, I wouldn’t dare,’ Pei Jin said.

The emperor didn’t believe Pei Jin. But he knew if he forced Pei Jin to tell him what Pei Jin was hiding, Pei Jin would give him a reasonable explanation. He wasn’t certain if Pei Jin was satisfied to be a carefree prince.

‘Ninth son, did you know earlier many court officials recommended you to be the crown prince?’ the emperor asked.

The emperor assessed the strange look in Pei Jin’s eyes. ‘Ninth son, tell me if you want to be the crown prince.’

Pei Jin knew his father’s smile meant if he gave the wrong answer then he would lose his life.

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End of Chapter Sixty

***Related***

# Sixty-One



## Chapter Sixty-One

The emperor's question was a hidden dagger.

Pei Jin didn't know how long the cold wind in his heart stirred.

'Imperial father, I promise my heart will not change,' Pei Jin said.

'That's good,' the emperor said and left the calligraphy room.

The emperor walked past the kitchen and the past haunted him.

'Big brother, I learned how to grill meat in Southern Jiang...' Prince Chen Nan said.

That one memory ruined his happiness to hear his ninth daughter-in-law was pregnant.

The emperor's imperial guards and imperial physicians escorted the emperor back to the palace.

Pei Jin's manor returned to its lively atmosphere.

'Your grandfather!' Xiao Zai cursed. 'Xiao Hui you purposely threw me over the wall! If I had landed on the emperor then I would have been cut into pieces! If you see me as an eyesore, you can tell me but don't harm me like this. Say something. Don't think I'll spare you if you don't say anything.'

Xiao Zai chased Xiao Hui around the courtyard.

‘Those two people are going to make me laugh to death,’ Yan Shi Ning said. She rubbed her stomach and pulled Pei Jin’s sleeve. ‘Pei Jin, what’s wrong? What did the emperor say to you in the calligraphy room?’

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hand. ‘Nothing. Your father-in-law asked me to behave.’

‘Did the emperor find out about something?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin shook his head. ‘Perhaps someone said something to imperial father.’

Suddenly Pei Jin’s guard, Xiao Ting entered the courtyard.

‘What happened in the palace?’ Pei Jin asked.

Xiao Ting reported to Pei Jin about the court officials’ conflict over who should be the crown prince and left the courtyard.

Yan Shi Ning shivered, she thought Huang Guo would only spread the secret about her pregnancy.

‘Why would Huang Guo want to cause trouble in the palace?’ Yan Shi Ning asked ‘It appears I’ll need to visit Huang Guo,’ Pei Jin said coldly.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin wasn’t upset about Huang Guo, he was upset about the emperor’s reaction. Pei Jin was also the emperor’s son but the emperor’s warning showed that the emperor never wanted to give Pei Jin the opportunity to inherit the kingdom. She held Pei Jin’s cold hand and thought the old AH was lower than her neglectful and opportunistic father.

Pei Jin patted Yan Shi Ning’s hand. ‘Shi Ning, it’s alright. I’m used to it. You can’t expose your deadly temper.’

‘Pei Jin...’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Um?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Pei Jin, why don’t we force that old AH who doesn’t want you to be his heir... have to open his mouth and beg you to be the crown prince?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Then what?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Then you’ll tell the old AH you don’t want to be his heir and let him be angry

to death,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, that's a good plan. Do you believe in your husband that much?'

'Don't think that I don't know what you're thinking,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin thought his little lion was more intelligent by the day. He kissed her and travelled to Huang Guo's manor.

Later at Huang Guo's manor, Pei Jin and Huang Guo sat opposite each other in Huang Guo's calligraphy room.

'Ninth prince, you must have heard what happened in the palace today,' Huang Guo said.

'Elder Guo, what are you alluding to?' Pei Jin asked.

Huang Guo looked at Pei Jin's cup of tea on the table. 'The tea is prepared and ready for you to drink.'

Pei Jin understood Huang Guo's motive. 'In this period if I drink tea then I won't be able to sleep.'

Huang Guo drank his tea and thought Pei Jin was more cunning by the day.

'Elder Guo, you're not young anymore,' Pei Jin said. 'It's not good for Elder Guo to drink too much tea.'

Huang Guo's back stiffened, he knew Pei Jin was warning him. 'Ninth prince, what did the emperor say to you at your manor?'

Pei Jin laughed coldly. 'Imperial father said a few words... Elder Guo wouldn't be pleased if you heard what imperial father said.'

Huang Guo grimaced.

Pei Jin changed into a more comfortable sitting position. 'Elder Guo, it's useless for your heart to waste energy.'

Huang Guo couldn't see through Pei Jin's thoughts. 'Ninth prince, do you have any grievances? But until the end, no one knows who the winner is and who the loser is. All the emperors in the past snatched the throne from their brothers.'

Huang Guo was a fool to have underestimated Pei Jin as someone who could

easily be manipulated. After the harvest festival incident, Pei Jin's manor was unaffected and Huang Guo realised Pei Jin was more cunning and stronger than he thought. Also, Huang Guo didn't believe the news about the empress killing herself. He knew Pei Jin was involved to avenge his daughter's death.

Huang Guo's spies in the palace confirmed his suspicions about the empress' death. Then he heard news about Yan Shi Ning being ill, he wasn't fooled because he knew Yan Shi Ning was a healthy woman so he sent his daughter-in-laws to Pei Jin's manor to see if Yan Shi Ning was pregnant. He was happy to hear his daughter-in-laws confirmed Yan Shi Ning's pregnancy.

After Huang Guo heard rumors about Pei Zhang's supporters want to recommend Pei Zhang to be the crown prince, he knew it was the right opportunity for him to see the emperor in the palace. Everything had happened according to Huang Guo's plan until Pei Jin visited him and warned him not to interfere anymore because the emperor had no intentions to let Pei Jin become the crown prince.

Huang Guo didn't lose hope because no emperors were given the throne, the throne was always conquered. But Pei Jin's indifference to the throne made him feel frustrated and powerless.

'Ninth prince, are you weary of me?' Huang Guo asked.

Pei Jin smiled coldly.

'Ninth prince, you don't have to be weary of me,' Huang Guo said. 'I promise I only want to help raise you to the highest position. All I want in return is that you promise to protect everyone in the Guo Household. Ninth prince, you know if seventh prince becomes crown prince then no one in the Guo Household will survive.'

'No one can predict imperial father's heart,' Pei Jin said.

'It doesn't matter if the emperor's heart only sees one option,' Huang Guo said. 'Ninth prince, earlier I told you it's precedent that emperors have always snatched the throne.'

'Elder Guo, how do you plan to snatch the throne?' Pei Jin asked.

Huang Guo knew Pei Jin was forcing him to reveal his plan. Of course snatching

the throne involved a strong army force. It was true Huang Guo had a secret army force but he wouldn't dare use his army force unless someone related to him like his adoptive grandson secured the crown prince position.

Huang Guo dipped a finger in the cup of tea and wrote his plan on the table.

'Ninth prince, what do you think?' Huang Guo asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head. 'It's good.'

'Ninth prince, what do you plan to do?' Huang Guo asked.

'Me?' Pei Jin asked. 'Elder Guo, I think I still prefer to be a carefree prince.'

Huang Guo was too angry to speak.

Pei Jin looked innocently at Huang Guo. 'Elder Guo, your decision to use a chess piece at this time isn't wrong. It's a pity you used the wrong chess piece.'

'You!' Huang Guo said.

'Elder Guo don't be angry,' Pei Jin said. 'Besides, Elder Guo is used to my way of speaking. It isn't easy to drink tea here. Elder Guo, I'll leave first.'

After Pei Jin left, Huang Guo's third son Fan appeared from behind a screen.

'Father, Pei Jin is despicable!' Fan said. 'Father, you lowered yourself in front of him but he didn't take the bait. I don't believe he has no desire to be emperor.'

Huang Guo grinded his teeth. 'He only doesn't like being controlled. Third son, wait and see. I'm certain he'll make a move.'

'Father, what should we do now?' Fan asked.

'Wait,' Huang Guo said.

'Wait?' Fan asked.

'Wait for him to eliminate Pei Zhang,' Huang Guo said. 'After the throne is his then we'll make our move.'

Inside the horse carriage, Pei Jin looked up at the moon and smiled. He didn't expect Huang Guo had a secret army. But he knew apart from him, Huang Guo didn't have anyone else to cooperate with Huang Guo. So there was no reason for him to allow Huang Guo to use him.



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End of Chapter Sixty-One

***Related***

## Sixty-Two



### Chapter Sixty-Two

The emperor decreed to keep the crown prince position vacant.

At Consort Mu's chamber, Pei Zhang threw a cup of tea at a palace maid's face.

'You dare to let me drink hot tea?' Pei Zhang asked.

The palace maid knelt on her knees in front of Pei Zhang.

Consort Mu stopped Pei Zhang from kicking the palace maid.

'Xiao Zhang!' Consort Mu said and signalled the palace maid to leave.

‘Xiao Zhang, you’re becoming more impatient by the day,’ Consort Mu said. ‘If you had kicked her, she would either die or be crippled. Do you want a rumor to spread about your cruelty? Now is a critical period. How can you lose control of your anger? I know you’re feeling the situation is unfair but you need to be patient and endure.’

‘Endure?’ Pei Zhang asked. ‘In the eyes of the citizens ninth brother has a perfect reputation. If I endure any longer then it’ll be me who’ll be kowtowing in front of ninth brother!’

‘If you don’t control yourself then it’s certain you’ll be kowtowing in front of your ninth brother!’ Consort Mu said.

‘Mother, what are we going to do?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘Think about it,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Between your ninth brother and tenth brother, who did you think is more suitable?’

‘Tenth brother?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘In the past your tenth brother had your imperial father, his imperial mother’s family support and the citizens’ admiration,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Where is tenth brother now?’

‘He lost everything and died,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘That’s right,’ Consort Mu said. ‘He had everything and lost. So we don’t need to fear someone like your ninth brother.’

‘Mother, you’re right,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Xiao Zhang, I know what you’re worrying about,’ Consort Mu said. ‘You feel threatened that your ninth brother has a good reputation, his wife is pregnant and he’s gaining support from court officials.’

‘That’s true,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Xiao Zhang, you don’t need to worry about those minor obstacles,’ Consort Mu said.

Pei Zhang listened carefully to his mother’s reasons.

‘Xiao Zhang, you can slowly improve your reputation,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Those

court officials aren't foolish. They know in the end you'll be the crown prince so they weren't dare to commit all their resources to support your ninth brother. What's important is military power!

'But Huang Guo's been too dormant for years... what if Huang Guo and ninth brother join their resources?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Xiao Zhang, do you still not understand your imperial father?' Consort Mu asked.

'Imperial father?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Your imperial father is someone who wants to control everything within his hand,' Consort Mu said. 'In recent years your imperial father feels he is slowly losing control of everything. It makes him angry enough to be mentally tired and as a consequence his health has declined. Do you think he wanted the harvest festival incident to happen? For Yan Shi Ting to fake a pregnancy? Your tenth brother to die? The empress to die? In front of everyone your imperial father acts like he's coping but the truth is he's grieving, their deaths have a deep impact on the state of his mind and health. He'll be lucky to live another three years.'

'Mother, is that true?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Xiao Zhang, do you think that Gentleman Zheng is the only imperial physician who is on our side?' Consort Mu asked.

'Who else?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Your imperial father's most trusted imperial physician, Gentleman Tao,' Consort Mu said.

Pei Zhang thought his mother was impressive.

'Xiao Zhang, if you were in your imperial father's position would you give the throne to the first son who is strong and has support from the most of the court officials or would you give the throne to the second son who is weaker and has no military power?' Consort Mu asked.

'Of course I would give the throne to the first son,' Pei Zhang said.

'That's right,' Consort Mu said. 'Your imperial father is someone who values

control. Of course he wants to give the throne to the son that has control over the imperial court and military power. Even though your imperial father isn't completely satisfied with you, he's not foolish to give the throne to your weaker ninth brother.'

'Mother, you're right,' Pei Zhang said. 'Imperial father isn't foolish to give the throne to ninth brother. Because after ninth brother sits on the throne, his supporters will turn against ninth brother and seize the throne. Imperial father wouldn't want his family dynasty to end with ninth brother.'

'Don't forget your imperial father suspected Huang Guo's ulterior motive long ago and that's why Huang Guo lost your imperial father's favor,' Consort Mu said. 'Now do you understand why I asked you to endure?'

'Mother I understand,' Pei Zhang said. 'If imperial father sees Huang Guo cooperating with ninth brother, imperial father will hate ninth brother even more and ninth brother will die pitifully.'

'It's good you understand,' Consort Mu said.

'Mother, what about Yan Shi Ning's pregnancy?' Pei Zhang asked.

'I couldn't stop the heavens blessing her stomach with a prince,' Consort Mu said. 'Your ninth brother's fate is too good. He hasn't been married for long but already has an heir.'

Pei Zhang felt ashamed he had many wives but didn't have an heir. His official wife lost their son when she was seventh months pregnant and their second child was a girl... at least his second wife was pregnant and perhaps he would finally have an heir.

'Mother, didn't you use Fu Gui to poison her?' Pei Zhang asked. 'How is it possible she's pregnant?'

'Perhaps I didn't use enough Fu Gui or someone found the remedy for her,' Consort Mu said.

Pei Zhang wasn't satisfied enough to eliminate the Yan Manor, the empress and Pei Lam, he wanted to eliminate Yan Shi Ning too.

'Mother, now I understand why Gentleman Tao was willing to help you by

giving the forbidden Fu Gui incense sticks to the empress to give to Yan Shi Ting to use in the Yan Manor without the empress knowing they were poisoned,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Your imperial father wanted a grandson for a long time,’ Consort Mu said. ‘If your ninth brother’s wife gives him a son and your second wife gives you a second daughter then I’m not certain what your imperial father’s final decision will be.’

‘Mother, what do we do about Yan Shi Ning?’ Pei Zhang asked.

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End of Chapter Sixty-Two

***Related***

**Sixty-Three**





## Chapter Sixty-Three

‘I don’t know why your imperial father favors your ninth brother’s wife more than your second wife,’ Consort Mu said.

‘That’s right!’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Imperial father even visited ninth brother’s wife and gave her two of his trusted imperial guards. I don’t know who imperial father is weary of.’

‘Who else can it be but us?’ Consort Mu asked. ‘I wanted to send our spies to your ninth brother’s manor but because of your imperial father, I can’t anymore. It doesn’t matter who wants to harm Yan Shi Ning. If anything happens to Yan Shi Ning while she’s pregnant, your imperial father won’t spare us.’

‘What do we do?’ Pei Zhang asked. ‘Do we stand by and watch her give birth?’

‘What else is there?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘Mother...’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Pei Zhang, don’t worry,’ Consort Mu said. ‘I have a way to deal with Yan Shi Ning.’

While Consort Mu and Pei Zhang were scheming, the bullied palace maid Xiao Nu was sobbing in a corner of the palace gardens. Her face was burning from the



hot tea. She wanted to find a soothing cream but she knew no one would give her the cream because they feared Pei Zhang would punish them. Besides, she was too beautiful and the other palace maids were jealous of her and happy her face was scorched.

Xiao Nu cried for half a day and finally someone pitied her and gave her the soothing cream. It took away the stinging pain but she knew her face would scar.

Wang Fu Mu was walking through the gardens but stopped after he heard someone sobbing pitifully.

‘Who do you serve?’ Wang Fu Mu asked.

Xiao Nu stopped crying, stood and bowed to Wang Fu Mu.

‘Official Wang, I’m Xiao Nu and I serve Consort Mu,’ Xiao Nu said.

Wang Fu Mu’s eyes brightened. ‘What happened? Who did this to your face?’

‘Official Wang, it’s my fault... I was careless,’ Xiao Nu said.

Wang Fu Mu didn’t believe Xiao Nu. ‘Do you know what happens if you disturb the peace in the palace by crying to amuse yourself?’

‘I... I wouldn’t dare... I...’ Xiao Nu stuttered.

‘Hurry and speak clearly!’ Wang Fu Mu said.

Xiao Nu sobbed, Wang Fu Mu coaxed her and finally she confessed Pei Zhang threw hot tea on her face.

‘I understand,’ Wang Fu Mu said. ‘Go find Gentleman Ting Zi. I’ll send someone to him and he’ll give you a remedy that won’t leave scars.’

Xiao Nu was deeply grateful, she continuously bowed to Wang Fu Mu.

‘In the future be more careful,’ Wang Fu Mu said and left.

Wang Fu Mu smiled while walking toward the emperor’s chamber. Wang Fu Mu survived in the palace for years and he knew small and big connections were both valuable. The emperor made it hard for Pei Zhang and Pei Jin to spy on each other. So any hole in Pei Zhang’s defence would benefit Pei Jin. Wang Fu Mu anticipated Xiao Nu would be useful in the future.

North of the imperial city, Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning travelled in a horse carriage

and they happily viewed the sights of warmer landscapes.

Pei Jin knew Yan Shi Ning hated the cold winter so he asked his father to let him take Yan Shi Ning to a villa north of the imperial city for her to bathe in hot springs and avoid the cold winter. His father consented and also gave Yan Shi Ning two of his father's most trusted imperial guards.

Pei Jin covered Yan Shi Ning's body with a thick fur cape and he fed her mandarin segments.

'Shi Ning, you only know how to eat and sleep,' Pei Jin teased. 'Shi Ning, you need to move a little.'

'Pei Jin, aren't you the one who wants me to act weak?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'So of course I need to eat and sleep.'

'If you didn't act weak then you wouldn't be allowed to go to the Feng Zhao villa,' Pei Jin said. 'Your father-in-law rarely allows anyone to visit the Feng Zhao villa. I've heard it was a beautiful place but I've never been there before. Your father-in-law is worried about your weak condition so of course we need to use this opportunity to visit the Feng Zhao villa.'

'Pei Jin, you're more of a schemer by the day,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin laughed like a fox. 'What else can I do? I know you're scared of being cold. When you were a little girl if it was a cold winter, you'll stay in bed and didn't want to go outside. So I'm scared you can't endure the cold winter in the imperial city.'

Yan Shi Ning didn't show Pei Jin that her heart was filled with sweetness. 'Pei Jin, are you hiding something from me?'

'Wife, everything your husband said was true,' Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning stared at Pei Jin's eyes for a while and he confessed.

'The truth is your father-in-law sent two of his imperial guards to follow us,' Pei Jin said. 'His purpose is to protect us and also spy on us. He's scared I'll secretly meet Huang Guo. That's why he let us go to the Feng Zhao villa because he wants to separate me and Huang Guo. If we get to amuse ourselves sightseeing and also make him happy then of course I'll grant his wish and keep my distance

from Huang Guo.'

Pei Jin thought Yan Shi Ning wasn't convinced he confessed everything. 'Wife, I also want to go to the Feng Zhao villa to bathe together with you in the hot springs.'

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin wanted to do it with her in the hot springs.

'Pei Jin, wouldn't us leaving the imperial city benefit seventh prince?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'It'll make it easier for him entice more court officials to his side.'

Pei Jin peeled another mandarin for Yan Shi Ning. 'Wife, you don't need to worry about seventh brother. Imperial father wants me to behave so I need to behave to let them slowly put their guards down. To me what's most important is my wife and child are safe. Consort Mu and seventh brother are too cruel. So for now we need to hide somewhere safe.'

'Are we truly not going to do anything?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Yan Shi Ning was worried Pei Zhang's second wife would give birth to a son and the emperor would make Pei Zhang the crown prince and kill everyone at Pei Jin's manor.

'Shi Ning, do you think we're wearier of them or they're wearier of our child?' Pei Jin asked.

'Of course they're wearier,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'If they haven't made a move then we don't need to be impatient and make a move,' Pei Jin said. 'Consort Mu is a venomous snake hibernating in winter. We'll be prepared to strike when they make a move. Also, seventh brother's manor has always been stormy.'

'Pei Jin, what are you implying?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Seventh brother doesn't care about beauty,' Pei Jin said. 'He only marries women from powerful families that are useful to him. Both his official wife and second wife are from powerful families. There's a saying that a mountain cave can't have two tigers unless one is a male and the other is a female. Seventh brother's manor has two tigresses. His official wife is petty and jealous. His second wife's heart isn't good either. His official wife and second wife have

opposed each other since the start. Of course his official wife isn't going to let his pregnant second wife sit on her head. His official wife will do anything to protect her own child and position. His second wife isn't going to stand idle, of course she'll retaliate. Shi Ning, don't let their harmonious act fool you. Inside seventh brother's manor aren't beautiful sceneries, no one can predict what will happen inside his manor... that's why it's best to have only one wife otherwise there'll be no peace in the family.'

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End of Chapter Sixty-Three

***Related***

# Sixty-Four



## Chapter Sixty-Four

‘Why does the emperor want to mislead outsiders to believe he’s indecisive between you and seventh prince?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Imperial father isn’t immortal,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Imperial father loves to have everything within his control,’ Pei Jin said. ‘He was disappointed tenth brother didn’t want the throne and he’s still grieving for tenth brother. He hasn’t found tenth brother’s killer so he must be angry to death. He hates being forced to do something he doesn’t want to so he hasn’t declared who his heir is. Also, he wants to vent his anger on seventh brother by not feeding seventh brother’s arrogance. Now the two of them can be angry to death together.’

After a day of travelling the horse carriage finally stopped. Pei Jin helped Yan Shi Ning out of the horse carriage and they looked at the beautiful mountain landscape together.

Pei Jin leaned closer to Yan Shi Ning and whispered in her ear. ‘Inside is more enchanting.’

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin was a greedy scoundrel.

Pei Jin led Yan Shi Ning and everyone else into the Feng Zhao villa and they ate

a meal together.

‘Bei Dou, am I the most handsome and kindest man in the world?’ Pei Jin asked.

Bei Dou spat out tea and Xiao Tu passed him a handkerchief.

Bei Dou didn’t understand why Pei Jin suddenly asked a strange question.

‘Bathing together is good,’ Pei Jin said softly.

Bei Dou finally understood Pei Jin’s question.

‘Imperial father’s guards are guarding outside,’ Pei Jin said. ‘They’re not allowed to come inside. I dismissed all the villa’s maids and servants. There’s only our people left.’

Bei Dou looked in four directions and nodded his head.

‘Bei Dou, under the sky am I the most handsome and kindest man?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Um,’ Bei Dou said reluctantly.

Bei Dou hated the cold winter. Xiao Tu didn’t want to do it with him on cold nights... she wouldn’t complain about the cold inside the hot springs.

After Pei Jin secretly bribed Bei Dou, Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hand toward the hot springs but they were stopped by Xiao Zai.

‘Ninth prince, under the sky you’re the most handsome and kindest man!’ Xiao Zai praised and tugged Xiao Hui’s hand.

Earlier Xiao Zai was hunting wild rabbits with Xiao Hui in the mountains so Xiao Zai only heard part of Pei Jin and Bei Dou’s conversation. But Xiao Zai judged by Bei Dou’s red ears that he would be rewarded if he praised Pei Jin too.

Pei Jin saw Xiao Zai’s bright smile and Xiao Hui’s frown.

‘Xiao Zai, do you want to bathe together too?’ Pei Jin teased.

‘Ninth prince even if it’s too troublesome, you’re still the most handsome and kindest man!’ Xiao Zai said.

Pei Jin realised Xiao Zai thought he was speaking in codes.

‘The two of you... want to do it together?’ Pei Jin asked.

Xiao Zai thought Pei Jin agreed to award him. ‘Yes, together!’

‘Who wants to do it with you?’ Xiao Hui asked. ‘Do you want to die? Ninth prince, is asking if I’ll be scrubbing your back!’

‘Your grandfather!’ Xiao Zai cursed. ‘Fat meat! If I was the one scrubbing your back then my two hands would be tired to death... don’t eat all my chicken feet, you wild chicken! How can you eat your brothers?’

Pei Jin dragged Yan Shi Ning to the springs while Xiao Zai and Xiao Hui were distracted.

The moment Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning entered the cave, he decided he was going to eat her three hundred times. The cold winter starved him for too many nights.

Unfortunately Bei Dou interrupted Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning before Pei Jin could undress Yan Shi Ning.

‘I forgot to tell you something,’ Bei Dou said.

Pei Jin didn’t like the bad news look in Bei Dou’s eyes.

‘It’s not safe for pregnant women to bathe in hot springs,’ Bei Dou said. ‘I’ll take Xiao Tu to the hot springs first.’

‘Bei Dou!’ Pei Jin cried out. ‘Come outside! I remember I need your help to do something important!’

Pei Jin believed sworn brothers should share blessings and sufferings together.

That winter was the coldest winter in the imperial city. Pei Zhang endured the cold and worked the whole winter while Pei Jin relaxed in the warm Feng Zhao villa with Yan Shi Ning. Pei Jin couldn’t bathe together with Yan Shi Ning but they listened to singers and musicians perform. When Yan Shi Ning was napping, Pei Jin went hunting for wild birds and rabbits. If he found anything rare, he would ask a messenger deliver it to his father... the messenger would return with news about what happened in the imperial city.

Huang Guo as Pei Jin expected had exploited the weakness of Pei Zhang’s manor. Huang Guo sent his daughter-in-laws to visit Pei Zhang’s official and

second wife and ‘accidentally’ found out about their internal fights which was spread to the emperor’s ears. Pei Zhang was busy assuring the emperor that Pei Zhang’s manor was a harmonious place. Consort Mu summoned Pei Zhang’s official wife and second wife to the palace to berate them.

Pei Jin was angry after he found out Pei Khan was hit. Apart from the spoiled Pei Wen Cai, no one would dare to hit Pei Khan. Pei Khan couldn’t endure Pei Wen Cai anymore and pushed her to the ground. The emperor wasn’t angry at Consort La but angry at Pei Zhang for not knowing how to discipline Pei Wen Cai.

The news that saddened Pei Jin the most was that the imperial physicians didn’t expect Consort La to live past spring.

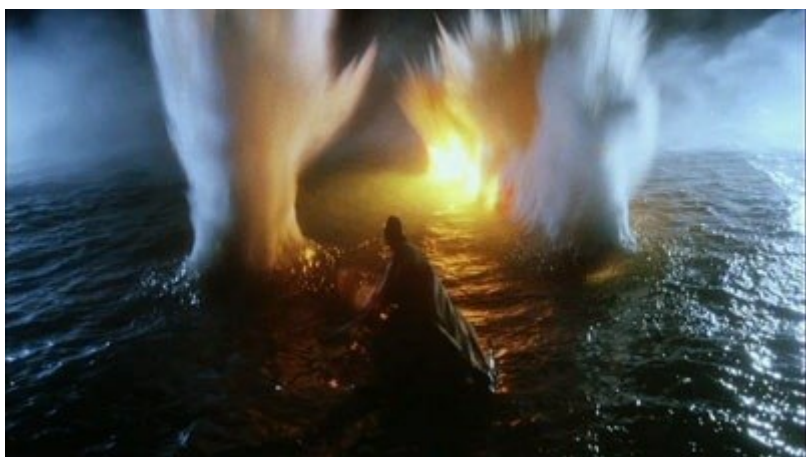
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End of Chapter Sixty-Four

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# Sixty-Five



## Chapter Sixty-Five

The Feng Zhao villa was a tranquil place.

Yan Shi Ning's stomach was big and she was expected to give birth within two months.

While everyone from Pei Jin's manor were excited to meet their young master, in Pei Zhang's manor was only chaos.

Pei Zhang's second wife, Dian Thi was the one who was secretly anxious.

Dian Thi sat anxiously in her chamber and rubbed her round stomach, she was seven months pregnant.

Dian Thi's personal maid Xiao Hai entered her chamber.

'How is it?' Dian Thi asked.

Xiao Hai looked in four directions for spies and spoke softly. 'It's done.'

'Did anyone see you?' Dian Thi asked.

'Mistress, don't worry,' Xiao Hai said. 'I saw him swallow it myself.'

Dian Thi stared out the window. 'Feng Lang, you can't blame me. For our child... you should rest.'

Feng Lang was Pei Zhang's guard. Dian Thi met Feng Lang after she married Pei Zhang, she thought Feng Lang was young and handsome. She would flirt with Feng Lang and over time Feng Lang fell deeply in love with her. But they didn't commit adultery until seven months ago.

Dian Thi was young and beautiful so Pei Zhang doted on Dian Thi. Pei Zhang's official wife Chu Thi was jealous of Dian Thi. After a few years, Dian Thi noticed Pei Zhang spent less nights in her chamber. Two autumns ago Dian Thi found out Chu Thi made Pei Zhang suspicious of Dian Thi.

'Husband, little sister had been married into the imperial family for many years but she's still not pregnant,' Chu Thi said.

Dian Thi was furious Chu Thi brought concubines younger and more beautiful than Dian Thi into Pei Zhang's chamber. Gradually Pei Zhang was colder toward Dian Thi and her temper grew hotter. Pei Zhang wanted an heir but Dian Thi wasn't pregnant.

Dian Thi used wine to forget her troubles. One night when she was drunk she remembered Feng Lang and from that night they secretly slept together.

Dian Thi was pregnant after sleeping with Feng Lang a few nights. She wasn't happy she was finally pregnant because she worried she would die a gruesome death. Before she could abort the child, Chu Thi found out she was pregnant. Dian Thi saw the joy on Pei Zhang's face so she swallowed her anxiety and acted like she was happy to be pregnant.

Pei Zhang doted on Dian Thi again because she was pregnant. Dian Thi was happy to see Chu Thi's grind teeth. But Dian Thi's feelings toward the child inside her was complex. She was scared the identity of the child's father would be exposed.

Dian Thi secretly met Feng Lang and coaxed him to keep their secret. Feng Lang loved her enough to promise her that he would take their secret to his coffin. Dian Thi was grateful toward him on their last night together and they promised each other they would be husband and wife in their next lifetime. After their last night together they acted like strangers.

Dian Thi's life as a pregnant woman apart from her anxiety was good. Pei Zhang doted on her and the emperor rewarded her with many valuable gifts.

Unfortunately after Dian Thi was seven months pregnant an incident happened. Pei Zhang's guards were drunk and they challenged each other who could climb into Feng Lang's chamber without being caught. A young guard found a woman's undergarments inside Feng Lang's chamber... it was Dian Thi's

undergarments that Feng Lang kept as a love token.

While the guards were speculating who the owner of the undergarments was, Chu Thi walked past them and recognised the embroidery on the undergarments belonged to Dian Thi.

Chu Thi interrogated Feng Lang why he dared to keep Pei Zhang's second wife's undergarments in Feng Lang's chamber.

Feng Lang protected Dian Thi and lied that he stole Dian Thi's undergarments because he admired her.

Although Feng Lang didn't betray Dian Thi, she was even more anxious and discussed with Xiao Hai how to deal with the dilemma. So Dian Thi pretended to hang herself to prove her innocence.

Chu Thi thought perhaps her suspicions were wrong. Since Feng Lang admitted his crime and Dian Thi proved her innocence, Feng Lang was beaten as punishment.

Pei Zhang wanted to kill Feng Lang but the emperor criticized Pei Zhang that he didn't know how to punish others according to their crime. Even though Pei Zhang couldn't punish Feng Lang harshly, Pei Zhang had Chu Thi to punish Feng Lang for Pei Zhang.

Chu Thi purposely sent news to Dian Thi that Feng Lang was severely injured and Chu Thi was suspicious why Dian Thi acted strange to receive the news since Dian Thi said she had no relations with Feng Lang.

After Dian Thi heard the news she resented Feng Lang for not killing himself. So she sent Xiao Hai to remind him he promised to take their secret to his coffin.

While Xiao Hai reported to Dian Thi that Xiao Hai saw Feng Lang swallowed the poison, Pei Zhang and Chu Thi appeared in Feng Lang's chamber.

Chu Thi was happy to see Pei Zhang's rage after he found out Dian Thi committed adultery with another man.

'Seventh prince, earlier did you see and hear everything?' Chu Thi asked. 'Xiao Hai is Dian Thi's personal maid. Xiao Hai said to Feng Lang that her mistress remembered he promised to take their secret to his coffin...'

‘Close your mouth!’ Pei Zhang ordered.

Pei Zhang was deceived. He thought he finally had an heir but it was a bastard child!

‘Someone go and tie up that woman scum!’ Pei Zhang ordered.

Pei Zhang left the chamber and Chu Thi smiled at the imposter Feng Lang.

‘Go and receive your reward,’ Chu Thi said.

The imposter Feng Lang thanked Chu Thi and left the chamber.

Xiao Hai met the imposter Feng Lang. The real Feng Lang had bitten off his tongue to prove Dian Thi’s innocence.

It was a pity Dian Thi wasn’t sincerely grateful the real Feng Lang killed himself to protect Dian Thi and their child.

Chu Thi purposely imprisoned Feng Lang to see how Dian Thi would react. If Dian Thi was guilty then Dian Thi would react recklessly. Chu Thi thought it was laughable Dian Thi was fooled by a simple tactic.

In Dian Thi’s chamber she was more anxious because she thought Feng Lang died too smoothly... her anxiety was right, she heard footsteps approached her chamber. She saw guards kicked her door open and her beautiful face whitened.

In the palace Consort Mu knocked over a teapot.

‘Is that true?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘Dian Thi confessed,’ one of Pei Zhang’s personal guards said.

‘Escort me to seventh prince’s manor!’ Consort Mu said.

Consort Mu lied to the emperor that Dian Thi was ill and the emperor consented.

Pei Zhang destroyed everything in the courtyard but no one conscious knew why except for Chu Thi.

After Consort Mu visited the manor, everyone else knew Pei Zhang wasn’t angry over something minor.

Consort Mu frowned to see fear in everyone’s eyes but she calmly walked

toward Pei Zhang's chamber.

Inside Pei Zhang's chamber he held a leather whip and Dian Thi was bound and unconscious on the floor. It was the fresh blood on Dian Thi's body that startled Consort Mu.

'Xiao Zhang, do you want to beat her to death?' Consort Mu asked.

'Beating her to death is too soft,' Pei Zhang said.

'Xiao Zhang!' Consort Mu said. 'Wake up! If you beat her to death, how are you going to explain her death to your imperial father?'

'I only want to cut this scum into pieces!' Pei Zhang said.

'It's useless to be angry,' Consort Mu said. 'How many outsiders know about this?'

'Two,' Pei Zhang said.

'Is there a chance this secret will be exposed?' Consort Mu asked.

'No, they're dead,' Pei Zhang said.

'Good, if that fox Huang Guo finds out... I don't know what your imperial father would do,' Consort Mu said.

'How should I deal with this scum?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Of course the child can't be spared,' Consort Mu said. 'But if this child dies, it'll be a disadvantage for us while your ninth brother's wife is pregnant.'

Consort Mu and Pei Zhang were in deep thought.

'If the child looks like her then the child can live until you have an heir... but if the child looks like him...' Consort Mu said.

'What do we do?' Pei Zhang asked.

'If this child must die then your ninth brother's child must die too!' Consort Mu said.

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End of Chapter Sixty-Five

***Related***

## Sixty-Six



### Chapter Sixty-Six

‘Mother, what’s your plan?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘The cold winter is over and they’ll be returning to the imperial city,’ Consort Mu said. ‘There’ll be many opportunities like Consort La won’t live past spring and your imperial father’s birthday banquet.’

At the Feng Zhao villa Pei Jin, Yan Shi Ning and everyone else were amusing themselves.

Some sat in front of the door and relaxed and others were hunting, playing, eating or sleeping.

They only needed to think about what amusements they should plan each day. Their only regret was that they couldn’t stay at Feng Zhao villa forever.

On the twelfth day of the fourth month, sad news was delivered to the Feng Zhao villa, Consort La died.

‘Pei Jin, why did Consort La die this sudden...’ Yan Shi Ning asked in a sad tone.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and asked everyone to pack their belongings.

That day Pei Jin, Yan Shi Ning and everyone else travelled back to the imperial city.

Inside the horse carriage Yan Shi Ning rubbed her big stomach. ‘Pei Jin, Consort La was only older than me a few years...’

‘Each person has their own fate,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What about Pei Khan?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘He’s only a little boy... who will protect him?’

Pei Jin thought Pei Khan’s situation was like his own childhood, he didn’t have anyone to protect him either.

‘Pei Jin...’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Um?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Can we bring Pei Khan to our home and protect him?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I want to bring Pei Khan home too but right now our home won’t be safe for Pei Khan,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning understood as long as the emperor was alive, Pei Khan’s life in the palace would be pitiful but Pei Khan would stay alive.

‘Pei Khan is a pitiful little boy... he’s only five years old,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning, it’s good for Pei Khan to experience pain while he’s young... it’ll help him grow stronger and adapt to life in the palace,’ Pei Jin said. ‘If we want to protect Pei Khan then we need to grow stronger until no one can threaten us.’

Yan Shi Ning held her stomach protectively.

‘Winter hibernation is over,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning and their child.

Later that day a simple funeral was held for Consort La at the palace. Yan Shi Ning was pregnant and wasn’t allowed to attend the funeral. She could only watch at a far distance. Pei Khan was too little so she couldn’t see him and had



to wait for Pei Jin to ask about Pei Khan.

‘Pei Khan silently cried,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I don’t know if Consort La’s death has hurt him mentally but now he can’t say even say two words.’

‘Pei Jin, go console Pei Khan,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘I want to but he’s surrounded by palace maids and eunuchs,’ Pei Jin said. ‘I won’t have an opportunity to talk privately with him.’

Yan Shi Ning felt helpless.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning’s hand. ‘In another three days I’ll take you to visit Pei Khan.’

Yan Shi Ning worried about Pei Khan. She knew the emperor didn’t favour Consort La because the emperor was ashamed of Pei Khan since he couldn’t speak. So the people in the palace wouldn’t care about Pei Khan.

‘Wife, is the little fox inside your stomach troubling you again?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What little fox?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin was happy to see Yan Shi Ning smile. ‘Wife, after little fox is born let’s conceive a little lion... we can’t... let’s wait another two years before we conceive a little lion.’

Yan Shi Ning was speechless. She understood why Pei Jin didn’t want their child to have a sibling too soon. Suddenly she heard a noise. ‘Pei Jin, there’s someone else here.’

Pei Jin looked at a small hidden spot. ‘Thirteenth brother?’

Pei Khan looked around the room. He didn’t see anyone else and crawled out of his hiding spot.

‘Thirteen brother, why are you here?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Where are your palace maids and eunuchs?’

Pei Khan’s teary eyes stared at Yan Shi Ning’s big stomach, it made Yan Shi Ning’s heart ached.

Pei Jin knelt in front of Pei Khan. ‘Thirteenth brother, did you hide here by yourself?’

Pei Khan pointed a finger at Pei Jin.

‘Thirteenth brother, were you waiting for me?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Khan nodded his head.

‘Thirteenth brother, what did you wanted to tell me?’ Pei Jin asked.

Pei Khan pulled out a hairpin and gave it to Yan Shi Ning, it was the butterfly hairpin she didn’t accept from Consort La.

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End of Chapter Sixty-Six

***Related***

# Sixty-Seven



## Chapter Sixty-Seven

Pei Khan held the hairpin.

Pei Khan listened to his mother's advice before she died.

'Xiao Khan, after I die you need to find ninth brother and ninth sister,' Consort Mu said. 'If they accept this hairpin then you need to be good and listen to them. If they don't accept it... you need to be careful in the palace. You can't trust anyone. You have to use a silver needle to test all your food and drinks before you eat and drink... Xiao Khan, I can't take care of you anymore.'

Pei Khan was scared if he blinked he would have no one left. His mother was

gone and if Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning didn't accept his mother's hairpin then he would lose everything.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's hearts were teared, Consort La used her life to protect Pei Khan and find a good place for Pei Khan before she died.

Consort La gambled everything on Pei Jin's brotherly love toward Pei Khan and Yan Shi Ning's maternal traits. She believed they wouldn't refuse a mother's last request.

Yan Shi Ning wiped her tears. 'Thirteenth brother, this is a beautiful hairpin. Hurry and put it on my head.'

Pei Khan's eyes shone and he listened to Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Khan rubbed Yan Shi Ning's big stomach. 'Little brother.'

'Thirteenth brother, this is your nephew,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Khan looked at Pei Jin for help.

'Thirteenth brother, are you saying the child is a boy?' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Khan nodded his head.

'Thirteenth brother, how do you know the child is a boy?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Khan pouted his lips. He hated girls like Pei Wen Cai.

Pei Jin led Yan Shi Ning and Pei Khan to the emperor's chamber.

Consort Mu, Pei Zhang and Chu Thi were waiting for their arrival. Yan Shi Ning saw the way they looked at her big stomach with bad intentions and she held onto her big stomach.

The emperor's hair had greyed. Although he didn't love Consort La, she still faithfully followed him for years. He looked at Yan Shi Ning's big stomach and he thought Consort La died too young.

'Seventh son, next time bring your second wife with you to visit me,' the emperor said.

The emperor only wanted to see all his daughter-in-laws at the same time. But Chu Thi misunderstood the emperor planned to elevate the scum's position. Chu Thi regretted Dian Thi's body hadn't recovered fast enough otherwise Consort

Mu's plan would have worked that day. Chu Thi fisted her hands, she couldn't wait for the emperor's birthday banquet to see Dian Thi die a gruesome death.

'Imperial father, I want to make a request,' Pei Jin said.

'What is it?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, thirteenth brother is grieving,' Pei Jin said. 'I want to bring thirteenth brother to my manor for a few days to console him.'

Consort Mu and Pei Zhang didn't approve. They were worried Pei Jin wanted the world to see how much brotherly love Pei Jin had toward his brothers. Also, they didn't want Pei Jin and Pei Khan's bond to grow deeper.

'Ninth brother is right,' Pei Zhang said. 'But perhaps it's better if I bring thirteenth brother to my manor. He'll have Wen Cai to play with. Wen Cai misses thirteenth brother and there are many delicious food too.'

Pei Khan shook his head. In the past Pei Wen Cai tricked him with delicious food and hit him too often. He wasn't fooled by Pei Zhang's words.

'Thirteenth son, you don't want to go with your seventh brother?' the emperor asked.

Pei Khan nodded his head.

'Why?' the emperor asked.

'Hit!' Pei Khan said.

The emperor remembered how Pei Wen Cai hit Pei Khan and he understood. He was displeased to have such a bad granddaughter. 'Thirteenth son, do you want to go with your ninth brother?'

Pei Khan heard his father's strange tone so he waited a while before he nodded his head reluctantly.

The emperor was satisfied Pei Khan didn't agree immediately otherwise it meant Pei Khan was cooperating with Pei Jin. 'Ninth son, take your thirteenth brother to your manor for a few days.'

The emperor agreed because he knew Pei Jin would take care of Pei Khan but most importantly he could use Pei Khan to spy on Pei Jin.

Yan Shi Ning was overjoyed the emperor consented to let Pei Khan stay with her and Pei Jin. While Consort Mu and Pei Zhang weren't pleased.

That evening Yan Shi Ning prepared a chamber for Pei Khan and stayed with him until he fell asleep.

Yan Shi Ning returned to her chamber and laid next to Pei Jin on the bed.

'Pei Jin, are you upset with me for accepting Consort La's request before discussing it with you?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'But I didn't want us to leave Pei Khan in the palace.'

'Shi Ning, Pei Khan staying with us too soon will be a little more dangerous for us and Pei Khan,' Pei Jin said. 'But don't worry, I'll find a way to protect all of us. Besides, you made your decision in front of me.'

Yan Shi Ning was relieved Pei Jin wasn't upset with her decision.

'I want you and our child to be safe,' Pei Jin said. 'I want Pei Khan to be safe too. In the future all of us need to be more cautious.'

Pei Jin's intuition warned him that he couldn't hide his real strengths for much longer.

Although Pei Jin and the emperor agreed Pei Khan could stay for a few days with Pei Jin, their unspoken agreement implied Pei Khan could stay with Pei Jin for a long period.

Several days past, Pei Khan adapted well to life at Pei Jin's manor. The guards, maids and servants looked after Pei Khan well and played with him. It eased a little of Pei Khan's pain of losing his mother.

Pei Zhang was frustrated Pei Jin surrounded Pei Jin's manor with more guards and made it harder for Pei Zhang to spy on Pei Jin.

Pei Zhang also discovered Pei Jin's guards looked ordinary but the guards were strong enough to kill intruders without a trace and they fiercely protected everyone in Pei Jin's manor. Because one of Pei Zhang's guards hid at a shop nearby Pei Jin's manor and at night the guard was attacked by a silent sword. If the guard didn't play dead and crawled back to Pei Zhang's manor to show the deep chest wound from one strike then Pei Zhang wouldn't have known how

strong Pei Jin’s guards were.

Pei Zhang wondered how Pei Jin could afford to raise strong guards. Pei Zhang slitted his eyes, he was anticipating their father’s birthday banquet in three days... it would be a memorable amusing day.

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End of Chapter Sixty-Seven

***Related***

## Sixty-Eight



### Chapter Sixty-Eight

The emperor's birthday banquet was held at the end of May.

Early that morning Yan Shi Ning felt the day was going to be a dangerous day.

‘Pei Jin, I’m scared something bad will happen,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Don’t worry, we’re prepared,’ Pei Jin said. ‘In the palace I can’t be beside you the whole visit but Xiao Tu will be there. Xiao Tu is Bei Dou’s wife, he taught her well. She’ll be able to detect any poisonous fragrances, food and drinks. He taught her some Kung Fu skills too.’



Pei Jin failed to reassure himself and Yan Shi Ning. He couldn't get rid of the invisible bad omen.

Recently Pei Jin and his guards protected Yan Shi Ning, their child and Pei Khan well against Pei Zhang's guards. Pei Jin knew that his father's birthday banquet was the last opportunity for Pei Zhang to target Pei Jin's family.

Pei Jin didn't know what Pei Zhang and Consort Mu's plan of attack was and it worried Pei Jin.

In Bei Dou's chamber, he watched Xiao Tu pack medicine and tools. He was also worried about the emperor's birthday banquet.

'Be careful in the palace,' Bei Dou warned.

'Yes, can I bring a dagger?' Xiao Tu asked.

Bei Dou silently looked at the dagger Xiao Tu held.

'I'm teasing you,' Xiao Tu said. 'I packed a lot of medicine, nutritious food and herbal drinks for ninth prince's wife.'

In the courtyard Xiao Zai was coaxing Pei Khan to speak. After Bei Dou examined Pei Khan, Bei Dou reassured everyone Pei Khan was intelligent and capable of speaking. It was Pei Khan's environment in the past that traumatized Pei Khan.

For several days Xiao Zai failed to trick Pei Khan to speak even though Pei Khan was happy living at the manor.

'Thirteenth prince, you can say anything good or bad,' Xiao Zai begged on his knees. 'What about two words? I made a bet with Xiao Hui. I said you will say two words by this morning.'

Pei Khan pitied Xiao Zai and patted Xiao Zai's head.

'Be good,' Pei Khan said.

Pei Khan saw Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning come out of their chamber and he ran to them.

Xiao Zai stood and touched his head. 'Be good? Why does thirteenth prince sound like my grandfather?'

Xiao Hui patted Xiao Zai's head.

'Be good,' Xiao Hui said and ran away.

'Your grandfather!' Xiao Zai cursed and chased Xiao Hui.

Pei Jin escorted his family and his guards to the palace.

At the palace Pei Jin's horse carriage arrived at the same time as Pei Zhang's horse carriage.

Pei Jin waited for Pei Zhang's group to enter the palace first.

'Pei Jin, did you notice there is something strange about Dian Thi?' Yan Shi Ning asked softly.

Pei Jin looked at Dian Thi in the distance. Although Dian Thi wore makeup and a beautiful dress, it couldn't hide her withered aura like someone attending a funeral.

Inside Consort Mu's chamber, she wore a more elaborate dress than usual. She wasn't pleased to see Chu Thi but she hated seeing Dian Thi.

'Don't act like a corpse... if you exposed anything... you know what will happen to you,' Consort Mu threatened Dian Thi.

'Yes aunt,' Dian Thi said.

'I considered your mother, my cousin who is like a sister to me so I spared your life this time,' Consort Mu said. 'But don't you dare to act shameless and ruin my plan.'

'But... I've carried the child for nine months,' Dian Thi said.

'Don't worry, I'll spare your life,' Consort Mu said.

Dian Thi clasped her trembling hands helplessly.

Consort Mu took off her bracelet and gave it Dian Thi to wear. Consort Mu wasn't pleased to see fresh bruises on Dian Thi's wrist and she looked disapprovingly at her son.

Pei Zhang resented he couldn't kill the scum. Each time he saw her, he could only hit her. He was careful not to leave visible bruises on her but he forgot to check her wrists.

‘It’s time to go to the banquet hall,’ Consort Mu said.

Consort Mu’s family left the chamber while Xiao Nu hid behind a window. Xiao Nu found the bracelet a palace maid ordered her to find. Xiao Nu also found out Consort Mu’s secret.

The emperor’s birthday banquet was held in the imperial banquet hall. There were dancers, singers, musicians and actors who performed at the banquet. The guests ate food and drank wine.

Pei Jin was too anxious to appreciate the performers’ skills. At his father’s birthday banquet the men and women sat at different banquet tables. Pei Jin couldn’t sit next to Yan Shi Ning, he could only look at her. He noticed Consort Mu and Pei Zhang were watching Yan Shi Ning too closely.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t dare touch the delicious food and wine in front of her. She was worried Consort Mu would dare to poison the food and wine to kill her and her son.

Yan Shi Ning was also weary of the venomous Chu Thi who sat next to her, Chu Thi was smiling at her but she felt Chu Thi was displaying fangs.

Yan Shi Ning calmly picked up a cup of wine and pretended to sip the wine while spilling it into her sleeve.

‘Seventh sister, forgive me,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I need to go relieve myself.’

Xiao Tu escorted Yan Shi Ning to a chamber the emperor reserved for his daughter-in-laws in the palace.

‘Mistress, calm down,’ Xiao Tu advised.

Yan Shi Ning watched Xiao Tu help her wipe her dress too calmly.

‘Little sister Xiao Tu, wait until you’re pregnant then you’ll understand how I’m feeling,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Xiao Tu thought Yan Shi Ning’s words were reasonable and nodded her head.

Yan Shi Ning sat on a chair near a window. ‘I want to stay here and rest. I don’t want to go back to the banquet hall.’

Xiao Tu quietly opened a small chest she packed. She used a silver needle to

check if the food and drinks were safe. Then she passed the small chest to Yan Shi Ning.

Yan Shi Ning's eyes brightened to see the familiar nutritious food and drinks.

'Ninth prince said his wife wouldn't dare eat the food at the palace so I secretly brought food into the palace,' Xiao Tu said.

Yan Shi Ning smiled, she thought Pei Jin was more considerate by the day.

Yan Shi Ning and Xiao Tu happily ate and drank together but Dian Thi entered the chamber.

'What are you two doing?' Dian Thi asked.

Yan Shi Ning raised her head and saw a maid help Dian Thi walk.

Dian Thi was nine months pregnant and had trouble walking. The maid helped Dian Thi sit next to Yan Shi Ning.

Dian Thi looked at the small chest of food and drinks and smiled. 'Little sister, does your body ache when you stand or sit still for too long?'

'Yes,' Yan Shi Ning said politely. 'Big sister, your complexion looks pale. Do you want to call an imperial physician?'

'It's alright, perhaps it's because I'll be giving birth soon,' Dian Thi said.

Dian Thi turned to face the maid. 'Go and bring me lavender oil. I feel a little faint.'

Yan Shi Ning was suspicious of the gleam in Dian Thi's eyes. 'Big sister, I rested enough. I'll go back to the banquet hall first.'

'Wait,' Dian Thi said. 'Little sister can you help me pour a cup of tea. I'm thirsty after eating salty food.'

Yan Shi Ning reluctantly asked Xiao Tu to pour a cup of tea.

Dian Thi accepted the cup of tea, lowered her head and blew.

Yan Shi Ning was startled to see Dian Thi swirl the tea with a fingernail. Yan Shi Ning remembered she and Pei Jin used to same tactic to deal with Su Yue.

Dian Thi spat blood on her dress.

‘Someone! Help!’ Dian Thi screamed. ‘What did you put in the tea?’

The maid rushed into the chamber and the maid screamed too.

Yan Shi Ning’s back turned cold. Consort Mu didn’t want to poison her...  
Consort Mu wanted to frame her.

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End of Chapter Sixty-Eight

***Related***

## Sixty-Nine



### Chapter Sixty-Nine

The palace maids and eunuchs ran in different directions.

Some ran to the emperor, others to Pei Zhang, Pei Jin and Wang Fu Mu.

In the chamber, Dian Thi collapsed on the floor and was bleeding continuously. Tears fell down her pale face and her stomach ached unbearably. Even in her pain she didn't forget to bite the powdered fingernail and swallow it.

Yan Shi Ning was too shocked to move. After she saw Consort Mu and Chu Thi

approached the chamber too quickly, she regained her composure.

Yan Shi Ning didn't know why Dian Thi cooperated with Consort Mu and Chu Thi to kill Dian Thi's child and frame her. But she knew the consequences, the emperor wouldn't spare Pei Jin and everyone at his manor for conspiring to kill the emperor's grandchild.

'Mistress, inside the tea are powder used to induce labour,' Xiao Tu said.

Yan Shi Ning didn't have any other options, she sipped the tea.

'Mistress!' Xiao Tu said.

'Don't worry, I only drank a sip,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Little sister Xiao Tu, you need to be my midwife.'

'Midwife?' Xiao Tu asked.

Yan Shi Ning clutched her stomach, the powder was too concentrated.

'My child is more than eight months,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'It's possible. I'm begging little sister Xiao Tu!'

Yan Shi Ning laid on the floor. She felt her stomach contract and cried.

Xiao Tu thought about what happened and understood Yan Shi Ning's logic. Yan Shi Ning wanted to save everyone at Pei Jin's manor by drinking the dissolved powder and giving birth prematurely.

Xiao Tu quickly helped Yan Shi Ning sit on the floor, pulled out a hairpin, pricked a finger and wiped the blood on Yan Shi Ning's dress.

'Ninth prince's wife is bleeding!' Xiao Tu screamed.

Xiao Tu's fingers pressed on some of Yan Shi Ning's vital acupuncture points and inserted a pill into Yan Shi Ning's mouth.

Everyone rushed to the chamber and saw Dian Thi and Yan Shi Ning were bleeding on the floor.

Consort Mu and Chu Thi were startled Yan Shi Ning was giving birth too.

'Ninth prince's wife is in labour!' Xiao Tu screamed.

A long time later Xiao Tu wiped Yan Shi Ning's sweaty forehead.

‘Mistress, you need to push harder,’ Xiao Tu said.

‘Ah... ninth prince’s wife is bleeding!’ the palace maids cried out at the same time.

‘Get out of here!’ Xiao Tu ordered the troublesome palace maids.

Xiao Tu looked calmly at the panicked and tired Yan Shi Ning. ‘Mistress, it’s alright. Mistress, you need to push harder.’

Yan Shi Ning bit down on the cloth and pushed hard. She didn’t know her fingernails were piercing her palms because the labour pain overwhelmed her senses.

‘Son... you need to endure and survive,’ Yan Shi Ning murmured.

Outside the chamber Pei Jin saw a maid carry another bowl of blood water.

‘What’s happening inside?’ Pei Jin asked. ‘How is my wife?’

The maid shivered to see the usual gentle ninth prince glare deadly at her. ‘Ninth prince... I don’t know.’

Pei Jin was angry and anxious. His wife and child were healthy. There was no reason for Yan Shi Ning to give birth prematurely unless something happened while she wasn’t inside the banquet hall.

Dian Thi and Yan Shi Ning were in labour in chambers next to each other. Dian Thi gave birth to a stillborn child while Yan Shi Ning gave birth to a healthy child.

Dian Thi looked at her dead son’s purple face and sobbed loudly.

Outside the chamber the emperor heard Dian Thi’s sob.

‘What happened?’ the emperor asked Dian Thi’s midwife coldly. ‘How is my grandchild?’

The midwife knelt in front of the emperor and cried for mercy. ‘Your majesty, seventh prince’s second wife’s child died.’

‘Died?’ the emperor asked.

The emperor didn’t believe what he heard. How was it possible for a woman who had a smooth pregnancy for nine months suddenly lose a child?



Pei Zhang acted shock and slumped on the ground and Consort Mu cried hysterically.

‘My grandchild was healthy,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Why did I lose my grandchild?’

Suddenly a child’s loud cry was heard and Pei Jin stood upright.

Another midwife carried a healthy child outside Yan Shi Ning’s chamber.

‘Congratulations your majesty,’ the midwife said. ‘Congratulations ninth prince, your wife gave birth to a prince.’

Pei Jin didn’t care if his child was a boy or a girl. ‘How is my wife?’

‘Ninth prince, your wife lost a lot of blood,’ the midwife said. ‘Your wife is in a weak condition.’

Pei Jin rushed into the chamber and parted the beaded curtains. Yan Shi Ning was lying on the bed, her whole body was sweaty and her hair was messy.

Yan Shi Ning cried happy tears. ‘Pei Jin...’

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning and cried. ‘Shi Ning...’

‘Yan Shi Ning!’ Dian Thi cried out from the neighbouring chamber. ‘I want to kill you! Give back my son!’

Yan Shi Ning gripped Pei Jin’s hand. ‘This is their scheme. Be careful.’

The emperor was sad to hear a grandson died but he was also happy to hear his other grandson was alive.

‘What happened?’ the emperor asked Dian Thi’s maid coldly.

The maid knelt in front of the emperor and cried. ‘Your majesty, I don’t know. I left to get lavender oil for mistress and after I returned I saw mistress lying on the floor and bleeding. I... I heard it was ninth prince’s wife who poisoned the tea.’

‘What poison?’ the emperor asked and signalled an imperial guard to investigate.

A while later the imperial guard reported to the emperor. ‘In ninth prince’s wife and seventh prince’s second wife’s tea are powder to induce labour.’

‘Who dared to do this?’ the emperor asked. ‘Find the culprit! Who were here when it happened? Who poured the tea?’

The palace maids and the eunuchs knelt and cried. ‘Your majesty, we were framed.’

‘Your majesty, the powder was only in their two cups of tea... it’s too coincidental... someone must have contaminated their tea in front of them,’ the imperial guard said.

Dian Thi and Yan Shi Ning were harmed so Xiao Tu was the biggest suspect.

Yan Shi Ning heard the emperor was interrogating Xiao Tu. She was weak but used her little strength to walk outside and kneel in front of the emperor.

‘Imperial father, Xiao Tu is like a little sister to me,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Xiao Tu risked her life to help me give birth. If she wanted to harm me, she could have easily killed me and my son.’

Pei Jin’s heart ached to see Yan Shi Ning kneel too soon after giving birth, he could only kneel next to her.

The emperor believed Yan Shi Ning, he didn’t think the culprit was Xiao Tu.

‘If it isn’t her then who else?’ Consort Mu asked. ‘There were only three of them inside the chamber!’

‘Why did you kill my son?’ Pei Zhang asked. He knelt in front of his father and cried. ‘Imperial father, you need to give my son justice.’

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End of Chapter Sixty-Nine

***Related***

# Seventy



## Chapter Seventy

‘Yan Shi Ning, why did you kill my son?’ Pei Zhang asked.

Yan Shi Ning was prepared for Pei Zhang’s accusation. She cried and hit her forehead on the ground.

‘Imperial father, it’s true I asked Xiao Tu to pour the tea for big sister Dian Thi,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘But I didn’t know what was inside the tea. I also drank the tea and was harmed too... my son could have died...’

Yan Shi Ning sobbed pitifully.

‘Who can be certain you didn’t risk your son’s life to kill my son?’ Pei Zhang asked. ‘Even though you drank the tea, you and your son are safe. What about my son? Your venomous snake heart schemed this!’

Yan Shi Ning heard Pei Zhang spit blood lies and threw dirty water over her body.

‘Seventh brother, what are you saying?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Are you saying because I want to kill your second wife’s child that I would risk harming my own child?’

‘To succeed you would willingly do anything!’ Pei Zhang said.

‘If what seventh brother saying is true then wouldn’t it also be true seventh brother would be willing to kill your son to frame me?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Zhang was choked by Yan Shi Ning’s sharp words. ‘Why would I ask my second wife to kill our son to frame you?’

Yan Shi Ning laughed coldly. ‘Seventh brother can suspect that I have a venomous snake heart and willing to sacrifice my son to succeed. Then why can’t I suspect your second wife?’

‘Everyone talk less,’ Consort Mu said. ‘What scheme? What frame? Take back your words!’

‘Mother, you’re also a mother,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘You understand the importance of flesh and blood. As long as a conscience exists, a mother would never risk their own child’s life. I didn’t commit the crime and I believe big sister Dian Thi didn’t commit the crime either. Although we don’t know who the culprit is but I didn’t accuse big sister Dian Thi. So why is seventh brother certain that I’m the culprit?’

Yan Shi Ning could only deflect suspicion on Pei Zhang because Dian Thi swallowed the evidence.

‘I can also empathise with seventh brother’s state of mind,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘If I lost my son I believe I would act more irrational than seventh brother and his second wife. But I don’t want dirty water to be poured over my body.’

Yan Shi Ning's breaths were shallow and her body swayed.

Pei Jin caught Yan Shi Ning before she fell on the ground.

'Imperial father, you know clearly what kind of person I am,' Yan Shi Ning said.  
'Imperial father, everything I said earlier was true-'

Yan Shi Ning fainted.

'Shi Ning!' Pei Jin cried out.

'Imperial father, even if she isn't the culprit,' Pei Zhang said. 'But they drank from the same cup. Why is it the person who drank the tea first is affected more than the second person who drank the tea?'

'Your majesty, it's because my mistress' body is healthy but seventh prince's second wife's body is weak,' Xiao Tu said.

The emperor's imperial guards reported that Yan Shi Ning was healthy and active at the Feng Zhao villa while Dian Thi was mostly bedridden after being seven months pregnant. So the emperor didn't believe Yan Shi Ning was the culprit. But... he looked at Pei Jin asking the imperial physicians to save Yan Shi Ning then he looked at Pei Zhang's tears and heard Dian Thi's sob... it conflicted his heart.

'Ninth son, your wife is weak,' the emperor said. 'Your wife and son should stay in the palace until they recover.'

Pei Jin's back stiffened. His father wanted to hold his wife and son captive in the palace. It meant his father suspected him.

The emperor sent Yan Shi Ning and his grandson to the chamber with a spacious nursery and a beautiful courtyard.

Pei Jin changed Yan Shi Ning's clothes and laid her on the bed.

Yan Shi Ning secretly opened her eyes and saw Pei Jin guarding her. She smiled and her stomach hurt.

'Shi Ning, are you in pain?' Pei Jin asked.

'It hurts,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'You know how to feel pain?' Pei Jin asked.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin wanted to hit Yan Shi Ning’s bottom. But he only gently bit her finger.  
‘When you’re home I’ll punish you.’

Yan Shi Ning looked pitifully at Pei Jin.

‘Shi Ning, you and our son needs to stay in the palace,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning widened her eyes.

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning’s forehead. ‘Shi Ning, don’t worry. I’ll escort you and our son home soon.’

Yan Shi Ning understood the emperor was suspicious of her and Pei Jin.

‘Shi Ning, you made the right decision,’ Pei Jin praised.

‘I fear it’ll be hard for me to see you in the palace for several days.’

‘I’ll take good care of our son,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘I want you to take good care of yourself first,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘I can’t lose you,’ Pei Jin said. ‘If we lose our child later we can have another child.’

‘I’ll take good care of myself,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I want to tell you a secret.’

‘Um?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Earlier I only pretended to faint,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin was speechless. He realised why a healthy Yan Shi Ning would suddenly turn weak.

‘I needed to faint to be more convincing,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Shi Ning, then why didn’t you wake up until now?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘While you were holding me,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘I felt sleepy and slept.’

Pei Jin didn’t know what to say.

Later Pei Jin returned to the manor. After Pei Jin recounted what happened in the palace to everyone, everyone were both happy and sad.

They were happy Yan Shi Ning gave birth to their young master but they were sad Yan Shi Ning, Xiao Tu and their young master were held captive in the palace.

Bei Dou was the least happy. Pei Jin asked to borrow Xiao Tu for one day, but Xiao Tu ended up implicated in a calamity.

‘Pei Jin, you married a good woman,’ Bei Dou said. ‘If she didn’t react fast then we could have all died.’

Bei Dou thought Yan Shi Ning was suited to Pei Jin and his Xiao Tu was the best woman in his eyes. It was only recently he instructed Xiao Tu how to help a female cook give birth but Xiao Tu was a fast learner and was able to help Yan Shi Ning give birth on her own.

‘What’s your next step?’ Bei Dou asked.

‘First I need to find out why Pei Zhang needed to kill his own son,’ Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou nodded his head. ‘They wouldn’t gain anything to kill their own son.’

‘Luckily Shi Ning ruined their scheme otherwise none of us would be alive,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Imperial father is only holding Shi Ning and our son captive to warn me to behave. Although seventh brother won this battle even a vicious tiger wouldn’t eat its own child. Especially if the child is a boy and would earn imperial father’s favor. I don’t believe seventh brother would act this irrationally.’

‘Are you saying there’s something suspicious about the birth of Dian Thi’s son?’ Bei Dou asked.

Pei Jin nodded his head.

‘That’s possible,’ Bei Dou said. ‘I’ll send someone to seventh prince’s manor to investigate.’

‘I want my wife and your wife to come home soon,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Otherwise you’ll be suffering with me.’

‘Two people?’ Bei Dou asked. ‘It’s three people.’

‘Three... I forgot about my son,’ Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Seventy

***Related***



## Seventy-One



### Chapter Seventy-One

Yan Shi Ning recovered from giving birth in the palace.

The emperor sent his trusted eunuchs and palace maids to deliver nutritious food and drinks to nourish Yan Shi Ning while she was recovering and breastfeeding his first grandson.

A month past, Yan Shi Ning walked comfortably and her son was chubby and loved to cry.

‘Heavens!’ Yan Shi Ning cursed. ‘Why does the little MF love to cry? Wasn’t he napping?’

Yan Shi Ning’s son loved to cry in the morning, afternoon, evening and before napping. Sometimes he even cried to amuse himself. Other children would cry a little then sleep. But the little MF cries until someone carried him. Of course the MF Pei Jin would have a little MF son.

A month ago Yan Shi Ning was fearful each time her son cried because she was scared an intruder came to harm him. But after a month she found out her son loved to cry so she was used to his crying.

Yan Shi Ning didn’t want to spoil her son by carrying him every time he cried.

But Pei Khan’s heart couldn’t bear to hear his nephew cry.

The emperor forbid anyone disturbing Yan Shi Ning, Pei Khan and his grandson to protect them.

So Pei Khan loved to guard his nephew day and night and take care of his nephew.

Pei Khan ran to Yan Shi Ning’s bed. ‘Cry, cry.’

‘Thirteenth brother, ignore him,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘He only knows how to cry day and night.’

Pei Khan thought Yan Shi Ning was serious and pitied his nephew.

Pei Khan ran back to his nephew’s cot. He remembered how his mother used to coax him to sleep and gently rubbed his nephew’s soft head. ‘Nephew be good, don’t cry. Rub, rub.’

Pei Khan’s nephew stopped crying. ‘If nephew is good, I’ll let you eat sweets after you grow big. Now you don’t have any teeth to chew sweets.’

Perhaps Pei Khan’s warm hand, gentle words and promise to give his nephew sweets in the future helped his nephew sleep.

Suddenly Pei Khan felt someone entered the nursery, he turned around and

quickly bowed to his father. 'Imperial father.'

The emperor came to check if Yan Shi Ning was doing anything suspicious. After he was satisfied Yan Shi Ning was only learning to make nutritious herbal drinks with Xiao Tu, he asked Yan Shi Ning to escort him to see his grandson. But he didn't expect his weak little thirteenth son knew how to speak fluently. It made him happy enough to fly into the sky.

Yan Shi Ning was overjoyed and knelt in front of Pei Khan. 'Thirteenth brother, you know how to speak.'

Pei Khan nodded his head.

'Thirteenth son, you don't need to nod,' the emperor said. 'You can speak like earlier.'

'Nephew stopped crying,' Pei Khan said.

'Thirteenth son, who taught you to speak?' the emperor asked.

'Ninth brother and ninth sister taught me,' Pei Khan said.

The emperor's heart softened a little toward Yan Shi Ning because she helped Pei Khan learn to speak.

'Ninth daughter, is it comfortable living here?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, everything here is good, except...' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Except?' the emperor asked.

The emperor understood Yan Shi Ning's silence meant she missed Pei Jin.

Yan Shi Ning didn't want to talk to the troublesome emperor. She overheard the eunuchs and palace maids gossip and found out the emperor sent Pei Jin to Xuan Qing to perform duties while she was held captive in the palace for more than a month.

Yan Shi Ning was also suspicious why the emperor visited her for the first time since she was held captive.

'Tomorrow someone will escort you and your son home,' the emperor said.

Yan Shi Ning thought perhaps Pei Jin completed all his duties.

‘Thirteenth son, it’s time you learn how to read,’ the emperor said.

Pei Khan was sad he wasn’t allowed to return home with Yan Shi Ning and his nephew.

Perhaps Pei Khan’s nephew knew he was feeling sad so his nephew cried loudly.

Yan Shi Ning couldn’t let her son cry while the emperor was standing next to the cot. She picked up her son and found out her son had soiled his pants.

Yan Shi Ning bowed to the emperor and carried her son to the bed. She cleaned his body and changed his clothes.

Yan Shi Ning turned around to ask Xiao Tu to pass a fan but she didn’t expect the emperor was standing nearby. She thought the emperor had left.

Yan Shi Ning assessed the emperor. He was looking at her son like he was curious and wanted to carry her son.

Yan Shi Ning smiled, she remembered a recent dream... she gave birth to a chubby child and the emperor wanted to carry her child but she carried her child far away from him.

In that moment she wanted to hide her son from the emperor. ‘Imperial father, who do you think he looks like?’

The emperor slowly accepted his grandson and carefully held his grandson. ‘His face looks like you but he has ninth son’s nose.’

‘Imperial father is right,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘He also has Pei Jin’s eyelashes and Pei Jin’s smile... hurry little treasure, smile with your imperial grandfather.’

Yan Shi Ning was coaxing her son to smile while gaging the emperor’s reaction. Indeed the emperor relaxed and softened after he heard imperial grandfather.

Yan Shi Ning’s heart cursed the emperor, ‘you’re only allowed to hold him this one time!’

‘Imperial father, give nephew a name,’ Pei Khan said.

The emperor had been busy with imperial court duties and didn’t have time to name his grandson.

‘Thirteenth son, what name do you think suits him?’ the emperor asked.

‘Thirteen brother, think of a meaningful name for your nephew,’ Yan Shi Ning prompted.

Pei Khan thought deeply but he was only a five-year-old boy. So he looked in four directions and saw a little bird was flying. His eyes brightened and pointed at the bird outside the window.

‘Fly?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘Thirteenth brother, do you want your nephew to be like the little bird so he can be free to fly?’

Pei Khan reluctantly nodded his head.

‘Pei Wen Fly...’ the emperor called. ‘Thirteenth son struggled to think of fly. But it doesn’t sound majestic. Let’s change fly to Fei, Pei Wen Fei. It’s a peaceful name.’

Yan Shi Ning thanked the emperor but Pei Khan wasn’t satisfied with his nephew’s name. Earlier he didn’t want to say fly, he wanted to say bird. He thought Pei Wen Niao and Xiao Niao were pleasant to hear.

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### **Short Side Story Five**

Xiao Fei: Pleasant to hear, your little sister!

Pei Khan: Pei Xiao Niao.

Xiao Fei: Little bird, your little sister!

Pei Khan: Pei Xiao Niao.

Xiao Fei: If you say it one more time, I’ll hit you!

Pei Khan: Pei Xiao Niao.

Xiao Fei: Cries.

Pei Khan: Be good. Don’t cry, rub, rub head.

Xiao Fei: Rub your little sister!

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End of Chapter Seventy-One

***Related***



## Seventy-Two



Lose at sunrise and gain at sunset (Chinese saying).

After sunset, HBAG Chapter Seventy-Two contains mature content.

### **Chapter Seventy-Two**

‘Mistress, Xiao Tu and young master is back!’ Xiao Zai announced.

Pei Jin was playing chess with Bei Dou. After Pei Jin heard Yan Shi Ning was back, he threw the chess piece and ran outside.

Bei Dou looked like he didn’t care but his legs ran fast.

The moment Yan Shi Ning carried her son and stepped out of the horse carriage, she saw everyone crowded together at the front of the manor. But her eyes solely focused on Pei Jin who stood at the centre.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning felt each day they were separated was like being separated for three autumns.

Yan Shi Ning wanted to run and hug Pei Jin. But Pei Jin ran to her and hugged her first.

‘Our son!’ Yan Shi Ning warned.

Pei Xiao Niao was squashed between his parents, his head ached and he cried loudly.

Pei Jin loosened his hold around Yan Shi Ning’s waist and assessed their son.

‘Why is he this ugly?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Even if he is this ugly he’s still your son!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Xiao Niao was insulted by his father and cried louder.

That evening everyone held a reunion banquet. After the banquet Pei Jin asked a guard to watch over Pei Xiao Niao in the nursery. Then Pei Jin dragged Yan Shi Ning to their chamber, locked the door and kissed her against the door.

Pei Jin tasted the sweet wine on Yan Shi Ning’s tongue. His hands slid down her dress and rubbed her plump breasts that were round and soft as soybeans. He felt like he could squeeze all the milk out of her breasts. He had been starved for too long so all his blood flowed between his legs.

Yan Shi Ning’s body was responsive to Pei Jin’s teasing, her body instinctively recognised his body. Her body turned limp the moment his hands touched her breasts. After he spread her legs wide apart, she couldn’t stand steady.

‘Not here,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning thought Pei Jin wanted to eat her at the door where other people could easily hear them.

Pei Jin carried Yan Shi Ning and kissed her lips on the way to the bed. He laid her on the bed and quickly took off their clothes. Afterward he pinned her to the



bed and entered inside her.

A hard body and a soft body connected and their moans and groans mixed together in the chamber.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's waist and pounded in and out of her body. 'Did you miss me?'

Yan Shi Ning clutched Pei Jin's neck, raised her head and kissed him. She closed her eyes above her flushed red cheeks. 'How can I not miss you?'

Pei Jin wasn't satisfied with Yan Shi Ning's answer and punished her by thrusting hard and deep into her.

Pei Jin wanted to eat Yan Shi Ning ferociously that night to compensate for all the nights they were separated. She cooperated with him. They were entrapped inside their haze of desire. Her body peaked many times and each time her body trembled, she begged for mercy. After the haze slowly melted, she felt muscle pain and didn't have energy to move even her fingers and toes.

In contrast Pei Jin's desire was insatiable. After he saw Yan Shi Ning opened her eyes, he kissed her lips.

'No...' Yan Shi Ning pleaded.

Pei Jin smiled innocently. 'What do I do about this?'

Pei Jin pulled Yan Shi Ning's hand to rub his hard erection and she cried for mercy.

'I'm teasing you,' Pei Jin lied. 'Let's bathe together first.'

After a long time, half of the water inside the bath tub was splashed outside of the bath tub and Yan Shi Ning laid limp against Pei Jin's chest.

'Go see your son!' Yan Shi Ning surrendered.

Yan Shi Ning napped but was awoken by Pei Xiao Niao's loud cry. She opened her eyes and saw Pei Jin was carrying Pei Xiao Niao and sitting on a chair. Pei Jin looked frustrated and Pei Xiao Niao cried loudly.

Yan Shi Ning sat on the bed. 'What happened?'

'I only wanted to hold him but I didn't expect he would cry,' Pei Jin said. 'So I

coaxed him to sleep... then this little scoundrel cried in his sleep!’

Yan Shi Ning picked up Pei Xiao Niao from Pei Jin’s arms and coaxed him to sleep for a while but he didn’t stop crying. So she took off her undergarments and breastfed Pei Xiao Niao.

Pei Xiao Niao stopped crying after he could smell milk. He suckled his mother’s nipple and drank milk.

Yan Shi Ning patted Pei Xiao Niao’s bottom and slowly coaxed him to sleep. She raised her head and feared for her life, Pei Jin was silently staring at her breasts.

Yan Shi Ning put Pei Xiao Niao back in his cot and returned to the bed.

‘In the future if you tease your son then you’re responsible for coaxing him to stop crying,’ Yan Shi Ning said. ‘Why did imperial father free me and your son?’

‘Imperial father’s heart grew compassion,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Why?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Shi Ning, do you want to know why seventh brother was willing to kill Dian Thi’s son?’ Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning’s eyes brightened.

‘Dian Thi’s son... isn’t seventh brother’s blood son,’ Pei Jin said.

‘What?’ Yan Shi Ning asked. ‘How did you find out?’

‘From a spy in the palace,’ Pei Jin said.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Two

***Related***

## Seventy-Three



### Chapter Seventy-Three

A month ago Wang Fu Mu secretly met Xiao Nu in the palace.

‘Official Wang, on the day of the emperor’s birthday banquet I heard Consort Mu said seventh prince’s second wife’s son must be killed,’ Xiao Nu said. ‘Official Wang, ninth prince’s wife was framed...’

Wang Fu Mu inwardly smiled while he listened to Xiao Nu confessing Consort

Mu's scheme to gain his favor.

That day the emperor summoned Pei Jin to the palace to receive an edict to go to Xuan Qing. Wang Fu Mu secretly passed a folded note to Pei Jin before Pei Jin left the palace.

Later that day Pei Jin read the note in the horse carriage, 'hates bastard son.'

Pei Jin didn't expect Pei Zhang wore a headdress of a fool and understood why Pei Zhang killed Dian Thi's son, the boy wasn't Pei Zhang's blood son.

Pei Jin knew Pei Zhang's motive so he sent his guards to Pei Zhang's manor to find evidence he and Yan Shi Ning were framed. His guards reported in the last three months there were two deaths in Pei Zhang's manor, a guard named Feng Lang and Dian Thi's personal maid Xiao Hai.

Pei Jin smiled coldly, Feng Lang was the father of Dian Thi's son. Pei Jin thought of a plan to spread the news to his father without being implicated.

'Why are you so calm?' Bei Dou asked. 'Don't you want your wife and my wife to return to the manor?'

'Wait another three days,' Pei Jin said.

Bei Dou glared at Pei Jin, another three days they would be in Xuan Qing. He hated suffering with Pei Jin.

After three days Pei Jin and Bei Dou arrived in Xuan Qing. Bei Dou hated the way Pei Jin wasn't anxious being away from the imperial city while their wives were held captive in the palace.

'Wait another ten days,' Pei Jin said. 'We'll return home and be reunited with our wives.'

In a busy restaurant in the imperial city two gentlemen were gossiping about Pei Zhang.

'Did you hear seventh prince is wearing a beautiful headdress of a fool?' the first gentleman asked.

'How do you know this rumor is true?' the second gentleman asked.

'I'll tell you how I found out but you have to promise not to tell another

person,' the first gentleman said. 'I heard seventh prince's second wife's dead son isn't his blood son.'

'Truly?' the second gentleman asked.

'Of course,' the first gentleman said. 'I have a close acquaintance who works at seventh prince's manor.'

'I see... but who would dare to sleep with seventh prince's woman?' the second gentleman asked.

'Didn't you hear about how seventh prince's trusted guard Feng Lang mysteriously died?' the first gentleman asked.

'Um, how is Feng Lang's death related to this rumor?' the second gentleman asked.

'You fool... think about why a healthy man like Feng Lang would die at a young age,' the first gentleman said.

'I see... you're saying-' the second gentleman said.

'It's a secret!' the first gentleman said. 'You can't say the secret.'

The two gentleman looked in four directions, everyone in the busy restaurant were eavesdropping on their conversation.

The two gentleman left the restaurant and took off their disguises in a remote alley and looked like their usual selves, Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai.

Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai's secret conversation spread throughout the imperial city within a few days.

Pei Zhang was furious after he heard everyone in the imperial city knew the truth about the bastard child. Pei Zhang beat Dian Thi to vent his anger and summoned everyone from his manor into the courtyard. He knew someone inside the manor betrayed him. Everyone in the manor denied they didn't betray him and blamed each other.

After the interrogation because of Pei Zhang's panicked reaction to the rumor, he realised he fell into Pei Jin's trap and soon their father would find out the truth.

At Pei Jin's manor Yan Shi Ning thought the Pei Jin fox was impressive.

'Wife, do you think your husband is impressive?' Pei Jin asked.

'Husband, how did imperial father find out?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Imperial father likes to pass by remote areas in the palace gardens... to eavesdrop on eunuchs and palace maids gossiping,' Pei Jin said. 'Thanks to Xiao Hui and Xiao Zai, seventh brother's secret was spread to the palace.'

'Are you saying imperial father sent people to investigate the rumor at seventh prince's manor and confirmed seventh prince framed us?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Imperial father suspected Dian Thi committed adultery long ago and that seventh prince framed us,' Pei Jin. 'Imperial father knows seventh brother would rather die than admit the truth. So imperial father let you go and he can only curse seventh brother.'

'Seventh prince still wins if imperial father can't punish him,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Shi Ning, be patient and you can eat hot tofu,' Pei Jin said. 'Seventh brother knows imperial father is watching him closely and he won't dare to make any moves otherwise he'll make imperial father angrier.'

In the palace Pei Zhang knelt in front of his father and hit his forehead on the floor.

'Imperial father, I haven't mistreated Dian Thi... but she betrayed me like this,' Pei Zhang said. 'I'm heart broken. I didn't want to hide the truth but I considered Dian Thi's family so I kept it a secret.'

'Are you certain you didn't keep it a secret so after Dian Thi gives birth you can become the crown prince?' the emperor asked.

'Imperial father, I was foolish,' Pei Zhang said. 'Imperial father, forgive me. I know I deserve to die. But I promise it wasn't me who framed ninth brother. That day I was angry someone harmed Dian Thi and said those heavy words to ninth sister... imperial father, I promise I don't have an ulterior motive. It wasn't me.'

Pei Zhang hit his forehead pitifully on the ground and hid his resentment toward Pei Jin.

Pei Zhang knew deceiving the emperor by using a bastard son as a bridge to become the crown prince and attempting to kill Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning's son were crimes that wouldn't escape death. Of course Pei Zhang would never admit the truth.

The emperor's head ached to see Pei Zhang acting convincingly in a I'll-tear-my-heart-out state of mind. It was a frustrating to death to witness it. Even though in the past he was guilty of using similar tactics, he still didn't condone Pei Zhang's actions. He felt helpless. Did he choose the wrong son?

'Imperial father, I have something important I want to report,' Pei Zhang said.

'Say it,' the emperor said.

'Recently I've been suspicious of ninth brother and my guards have followed him... ninth brother is stronger than he appears,' Pei Zhang said.

'How?' the emperor asked.

Pei Zhang was impressed his mother was right about his father's weariness toward Pei Jin.

'Imperial father, my guards discovered ninth brother's guards are exceptionally strong,' Pei Zhang said. 'If ninth brother is gentle and weak then how can he afford to raise strong guards?'

Pei Zhang was happy to see his father silently planning to expose Pei Jin's real capabilities. His mother was right, his father hated Pei Jin.

After the emperor dismissed Pei Zhang, he put down his brush. He didn't know if Pei Zhang was truly a filial son and he wasn't certain Pei Jin was hiding ulterior motives. He smiled coldly, he planned a way to see his sons' true hearts.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Three

***Related***

## Seventy-Four



### Chapter Seventy-Four

The emperor collapsed.

The palace was in chaos, the emperor was unconscious after someone saw the emperor spat out blood and the emperor's consorts and princes were forbidden to enter the emperor's chamber.

The court officials feared if the emperor didn't wake up in a few days then there would be a bloody war in the palace since the crown prince position was vacant.

Luckily two days later the emperor woke up.



Inside Consort Mu's chamber Pei Zhang interrogated a eunuch.

'Did you say inside imperial father's hidden edict, he wants ninth prince to be the crown prince?' Pei Zhang asked the eunuch.

'Seventh prince, I saw it while the emperor showed it to Gentleman Yang,' the eunuch said on his knees. 'Then I secretly came here to report to seventh prince.'

'What did Gentleman Yang say?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Gentleman Yang said the emperor's body is weak and he feared the emperor's medicine couldn't prolong the emperor's life for much longer,' the eunuch said. 'Then the emperor said if in the future he becomes unconscious for more than a few days then Gentleman Yang should euthanized him.'

Consort Mu panicked. What would happen if Gentleman Yang granted the emperor's request?

Pei Zhang dismissed the eunuch.

'Mother, what should we do?' Pei Zhang asked. 'Mother, didn't you say imperial father wouldn't give the crown prince position to ninth brother?'

'Your imperial father's heart is hard to see,' Consort Mu said. 'Besides, I said that before Dian Thi's incident! You don't have an heir and your imperial father doesn't love you. It's reasonable your imperial father would choose your ninth brother.'

'Are we going to wait to witness ninth brother sit on the throne?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Your imperial father hid the edict and hasn't announced it because he's still indecisive,' Consort Mu said.

'If imperial father wrote the edict it shows who he chose,' Pei Zhang said. 'He hasn't announced it but it doesn't mean it won't be announced later. If that happens then ninth prince's boat is built!'

'What do you want to do?' Consort Mu asked. 'Go to your imperial father's chamber and tear the edict? If you do that then prepare to give up everything.'

'Mother!' Pei Zhang said.

Consort Mu frowned.

‘Mother, you’re right,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘What are you planning to do?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘I should steal the edict before it’s announced,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Reckless fool!’ Consort Mu said.

‘What reckless fool?’ Pei Zhang said. ‘We’ve built our power over many years and many court officials support us. It’s easy for us to sneak into imperial father’s chamber in the middle of the night. We can force imperial father to change the edict.’

‘If your imperial father refuses do you intend to kill your imperial father and steal the throne?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘If imperial father rather dies than change it then I’ll grant his request,’ Pei Zhang said.

Consort Mu’s whole body was cold like ice.

‘Mother, if ninth brother sits on the throne you know he won’t spare our lives,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘It’s better if I steal the throne before the edict is announced. Otherwise if I wait to steal the throne after ninth brother is the emperor, we’ll become traitors in the eyes of citizens and they’ll rebel.’

Consort Mu thought about Pei Zhang’s logic and she fisted her hands.

‘Mother...’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Wait,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Don’t do anything reckless. Let me confirm something and we can discuss what to do afterward.’

‘Confirm what?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘I want to see Gentleman Tao,’ Consort Mu said.

That evening Consort Mu secretly met Gentleman Tao and they spoke through a door hole.

‘I want to ask you something,’ Consort Mu said.

‘Yes,’ Tao Ping said.

‘How is the emperor?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘His majesty has two years,’ Tao Ping said.

‘Truly?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘Before the crown prince and the empress died, his majesty had four to five years,’ Tao Ping said.

‘What about the rumor the emperor only has a few days to live?’ Consort Mu asked.

Consort Mu was anxious why Gentleman Tao didn’t answer her. She looked through the hole and only saw the night’s darkness.

‘Why aren’t you saying anything?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘His majesty is manoeuvring a chess piece,’ Tao Ping said. ‘The emperor ordered if anyone exposes his plan then they’ll be killed immediately.’

‘What is the emperor’s purpose?’ Consort Mu asked.

‘His majesty wants to see who’ll support seventh prince and who’ll support ninth prince,’ Tao Ping said. ‘Whoever acts recklessly first then the emperor won’t spare them. Consort Mu, I hope you’ll patiently wait to see what happens.’

‘Alright,’ Consort Mu said. ‘Why didn’t you find me earlier to report to me about something this important?’

‘Consort Mu, you were born intelligent,’ Tao Ping praised. ‘Of course you’ll see through his majesty’s plan.’

Consort Mu farewell Gentleman Tao and left.

In the emperor’s chamber Wang Fu Mu stayed by the emperor’s bedside, he didn’t dare leave the chamber to warn Pei Jin. He hoped Pei Jin would see through the emperor’s plan.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Four

***Related***

## Seventy-Five



### Chapter Seventy-Five

News of the emperor's collapse spread across the imperial city.

At Pei Jin's manor Pei Xiao Niao was crying for his mother but his mother was napping.

Pei Jin picked up Pei Xiao Niao from the cot and played with him on a chair.

It was a sunny day and the chubby Pei Xiao Niao wore thin pink clothes.

Pei Jin happily held the chubby Pei Xiao Niao in one arm and teased Pei Xiao Niao with a small soft colourful cuju ball with his free hand.

Pei Xiao Niao's round eyes brightened and followed the cuju ball's movements. His raised his short arms in the air but his father didn't give him the cuju ball.

Pei Jin moved the cuju ball close to his son. Each time his son was about to grab the cuju ball, he moved the cuju ball away. He smiled while he teased his son but his son's lips pouted and his son cried loudly.

Pei Jin coaxed his son who loved to cry because he didn't want to disturb Yan Shi Ning's nap.

'Ninth prince, Huang Guo is here to see you,' a servant said.

'I understand,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin looked at his son who stopped crying. His son had grabbed the cuju ball while he was distracted. He smiled at his son who was happily playing with the cuju ball.

Pei Jin saw his son was about to eat the cuju ball and gently pulled the cuju ball away from his son's mouth.

'Son, why are you a glutton like your mother?' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Xiao Niao was about to cry because his father stole his food but his father stood and hugged him tightly. He looked over his father's shoulder and saw a stranger.

'Ninth prince, your son is handsome,' Huang Guo praised.

'Elder is too kind,' Pei Jin said. 'My son isn't handsome.'

Pei Jin thought his son was ugly when his son was a wrinkled one month boy. But after raising his son for two months, his son was growing more handsome by the day.

'Indeed he has a majestic aura,' Huang Guo praised.

Pei Jin smiled and gestured for Huang Guo to sit.

Pei Jin sat down on a chair. He hugged his son and bounced his son on his knees.

Pei Xiao Niao happily sucked the soft round bun his father gave him and he looked at the stranger in front of him.

'I came to discuss something with ninth prince,' Huang Guo said.

'Elder's face looks serious,' Pei Jin said. 'It must be important.'

‘Something serious happened,’ Huang Guo said.

‘What?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘The emperor wrote an edict,’ Huang Guo said. ‘Congratulations ninth prince, the emperor chose you to be the crown prince.’

Pei Jin didn’t expect his father would choose him to be the crown prince.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning’s happy reunion was interrupted by the news of his father’s collapse. He heard the rumor about his father only had a few days to left so he sent his guards to the palace to investigate but didn’t find anything unusual. He and Yan Shi Ning could only patiently wait at home.

Huang Guo’s news made Pei Jin’s heart jump chaotically but he maintained his calm appearance.

‘We should seize this opportunity,’ Huang Guo said.

Pei Jin narrowed his eyes.

‘The emperor wrote the edict but he hasn’t announced it,’ Huang Guo said. ‘It means he’s still indecisive. We should act and the throne is yours.’

Pei Jin hugged his son tighter and realised he did care about who his father wanted to give the throne to.

Huang Guo thought finally his years of scheming didn’t become smoke.

‘Everything is prepared,’ Huang Guo said.

Huang Guo’s army only needed his command and his army would march into the palace.

Pei Jin’s son’s cry broke his deep thoughts. His son had urinated on his knees.

Luckily Pei Jin’s son cried otherwise he would have lost sight at what was most important. He had always been cautious and understood his status. His father’s decision and Huang Guo’s persuasion had disrupted his plan... he was truly grateful for his son.

Pei Jin stood, carried his son in his arms and smiled. If he didn’t have his son then in that moment he would have made an irreversible mistake. He had his wife and son, he couldn’t be selfish and risk their lives to make a dangerous

chess move. Besides, Wang Fu Mu's silence was the biggest warning. Wang Fu Mu's silence meant if he made a reckless move then he and his family would die.

Pei Jin's chaotic heart calmed. 'I truly only want to be a carefree prince.'

Huang Guo wanted to vomit blood.

A servant escorted Huang Guo to the horse carriage.

Pei Jin kissed his son's cheeks and happily ran to the chamber to change his son's clothes.

'Son, be good,' Pei Jin coaxed. 'You're my good son. Don't cry.'

Pei Xiao Niao didn't know his father was grateful he urinated on his father's knees and restored his father's common sense, he continued to cry because his pants were wet.

Pei Xiao Niao's loud cry woke up Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Xiao Niao saw his mother, stretched his arms toward his mother and cried louder.

'You're not allowed to cry!' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Xiao Niao was startled his mother raised her voice. He pouted his lips, buried his head in his father's chest and didn't dare to cry.

Yan Shi Ning noticed her son's pants were wet. She picked up her son from Pei Jin's arms and changed her son's clothes.

'Earlier did Huang Guo visit you?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Um' Pei Jin said.

'What's happening in the palace?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'I heard imperial father wrote an edict to make seventh brother the crown prince,' Pei Jin lied.

'What should we do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Wait and see what happens,' Pei Jin said. 'I think there's something suspicious about the news. Huang Guo wants to lend his army to me for me to steal the throne. But I don't dare. Wan Fu Mu hasn't send news to me so I don't want to

do anything reckless.'

'What if the news is true?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'Do we watch Pei Zhang sit on the throne?'

'If it's true then we'll escape to Southern Jiang,' Pei Jin said. 'He can't kill us if we're not in the imperial city. Besides, I don't have enough people in our home to defeat Huang Guo's army.'

'But it's not fair,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning wouldn't accept Pei Zhang as the emperor and she didn't think the emperor was fair toward Pei Jin.

Pei Jin held Yan Shi Ning's hand. It wasn't the right time for him to make a move.

Pei Jin waited days for his father's edict, each day was like waiting a year. But the edict didn't come so he didn't make a move.

In the palace Wang Fu Mu was as anxious as Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning. Wang Fu Mu hated relying on an outsider, but he had no choice if he wanted to protect Pei Jin and Pei Jin's family.

Wang Fu Mu walked to the secret spot in the palace gardens where Xiao Nu raised a cat. Luckily Xiao Nu was feeding the cat.

'Tomorrow give this handkerchief to ninth prince's wife in the Tang Ming courtyard,' Wang Fu Mu said. 'Keep it a secret otherwise both of us will die with no proper burial.'

That night Xiao Nu didn't sleep. The handkerchief Wang Fu Mu gave her felt too heavy.

Xiao Nu didn't know why Wang Fu Mu asked her to give the handkerchief to ninth prince's wife and she wasn't familiar with ninth prince and ninth prince's wife. But it was enough that she knew Wang Fu Mu treated her kindly and never bullied her.

Early the following morning she secretly hid in the Tang Ming courtyard and she waited for ninth prince's wife.

That morning Wang Fu Mu stayed in the emperor's chamber and gambled



everything on Pei Jin's habit of passing through the Tang Ming courtyard to walk to the emperor's courtyard.

Later that morning Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning was passing through the Tang Ming courtyard and they were startled an unfamiliar palace maid stopped them. But they relaxed after the palace maid gave Yan Shi Ning a handkerchief and told them it was from Wang Fu Mu.

Xiao Nu bowed to ninth prince and ninth prince's wife then she quickly left.

'What does this handkerchief mean?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

There was only a riddle on the handkerchief, 'two people raising their heads smiling, only saying savor.'

Pei Jin knew Wang Fu Mu was more cautious than he was so he was still startled Wang Fu Mu would rely on an outsider to warn him. But he thought deeply about what the handkerchief meant.

Pei Jin stared at the handkerchief for a long time and realised he thought too deeply. Wang Fu Mu wasn't an educated scholar so for Wang Fu Mu to write a riddle and use an outsider then the situation was serious.

Pei Jin thought about how Wang Fu Mu spoke. Each time Wang Fu Mu spoke, Wang Fu Mu would emphasized the first word. Pei Jin looked at 'two' and 'only.' 'Liang Zhi' sounded similar to 'Zhao Shu' which meant edict. Pei Jin shivered, his father was too ruthless.

'Imperial father isn't dying,' Pei Jin said. 'He's pretending to be ill and wanted to see who would commit treason after receiving news of the unannounced edict.'

'Imperial father is too insane,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'But if your speculation is true then it's strange that someone impatient like Pei Zhang hasn't acted recklessly.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning thought about why Pei Zhang didn't kill the emperor then they looked at each other at the same time.

'Who do you think is their spy in the palace?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'The five people who are allowed to enter imperial father's chamber are Wang Fu Mu and his four most trusted imperial physicians,' Pei Jin said. 'We know it

isn't Wang Fu Mu so it's one of the four imperial physicians.'

'Pei Jin, how do you think imperial father will react if he knew we found out what chess piece he's using?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Perhaps imperial father will become more insane,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning smiled at each other.

'Shi Ning, I wasn't certain us waiting to see what happens would benefit us but now I know it was the right decision,' Pei Jin said. 'What do you think seventh bother wants the most?'

'He wants us to lose to imperial father's chess piece,' Yan Shi Ning said. 'Why?'

Pei Jin smiled. 'We'll grant his wish.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning walked to the emperor's courtyard where a large crowd gathered.

Pei Khan was overjoyed to see Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Khan pulled Yan Shi Ning's sleeve. 'Where's my nephew?'

Yan Shi Ning saw the anticipation in Pei Khan's eyes and she didn't want to tell him the bad news. 'Your nephew is sleeping at... home.'

Pei Khan scrunched his face and frowned. He missed his nephew Xiao Niao a lot.

Later that day Pei Zhang returned to his manor and he was grateful his mother met Gentleman Tao and found out about his father's plan. Otherwise he would have acted recklessly and lost his life.

Pei Zhang looked at the bright sky and anticipated his new status. He only needed to wait for Pei Jin to make the wrong move. If he was Pei Jin, he wouldn't do nothing if he found out news about their father's hidden edict for Pei Jin to be the crown prince. But if Pei Jin didn't do anything, it meant Pei Jin truly wanted to be a carefree prince. Then he wouldn't win or lose and their father's plan was meaningless.

'Seventh prince, ninth prince made a move,' a guard said.

'Hurry and say it,' Pei Zhang said.

‘Ninth prince is hiding people inside his manor,’ the guard said.

Pei Zhang was happy he ordered his guards to follow Pei Jin closely. He thought Pei Jin must have received news of their father’s edict and secretly hid Huang Guo’s men in Pei Jin’s manor.

‘Seventh prince, I and the other guards secretly searched their horse carriages,’ the guards said. ‘The horse carriages are full of cannon balls and arrows.’

Pei Zhang laughed triumphantly. ‘Keep following him and his guards. Report to me immediately if any of them make any sudden movements.’

Pei Zhang was happy while waiting a few days for Pei Jin to strike. But after a few days he gritted his teeth, Pei Jin didn’t strike and he was worried that Pei Jin decided to retreat.

‘Are you certain he hasn’t made any sudden moves?’ Pei Zhang asked the guard.

‘I’m certain,’ the guards said. ‘But ninth prince’s guards have been collecting water from neighbouring wells.’

‘Water?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘Yes but I and the guards secretly checked it was only water,’ the guard said.

‘What about his people?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘None of them made any sudden movements either,’ the guard said.

Half a shichen hour later the guard returned to Pei Zhang’s manor.

‘Ninth prince instructed his guards to prepare to strike!’ the guard said.

Pei Zhang was happy to receive good news again. He waited for another two shichen hours but Pei Jin and his guards were stationary.

‘Are you certain he told his guards to prepare to strike?’ Pei Zhang asked the guard.

‘I’m certain,’ the guard said.

‘Take more guards with you and ensure no one leaves his manor!’ Pei Zhang said. ‘I’m going to the palace.’

At Pei Jin’s manor Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning were happily playing chess together.

‘Ninth prince, seventh prince’s sent more guards here and seventh prince is travelling to the palace,’ a guard reported and left the chamber.

‘Wife, the fish took the bait,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Checkmate,’ Yan Shi Ning said.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Five

***Related***

## Seventy-Six



### Chapter Seventy-Six

Pei Zhang entered the palace in the middle of the night.

The emperor waited many days for his sons to make a move. Finally one of his sons dared to unlock palace gates after curfew. He got out of bed and wore his outer robe.

‘Your majesty, seventh prince asked to see your majesty,’ an imperial guard said. ‘Seventh prince said it was important.’

‘I understand,’ the emperor said.

The emperor was disappointed it was only one of his sons.

Pei Zhang entered his father’s chamber and bowed. ‘Imperial father, have you

recovered?’

The emperor feigned a cough. He didn’t believe Pei Zhang’s filial son act. ‘Seventh son, what is so important that you needed to see me in the middle of the night?’

‘Imperial father, I found out ninth brother is prepared for a rebellion!’ Pei Zhang said.

The emperor assessed Pei Zhang. He needed to see for himself if Pei Jin truly intended to rebel as Pei Zhang reported.

‘Imperial father, my guards have followed ninth brother’s suspicious activities for many days,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Ninth brother is hiding Huang Guo’s men in his manor. Imperial father, what are you going to do?’

‘Do what?’ the emperor asked.

Pei Zhang shivered to see his father’s intimidating aura.

‘Imperial father, I have a request,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Say it,’ the emperor said.

‘Imperial father, if ninth brother truly wants to rebel... imperial father please forgive ninth brother for his ignorant offence,’ Pei Zhang said.

The emperor narrowed his eyes.

‘Imperial father, I believe others are forcing ninth brother to rebel,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘This is why I wanted to report to imperial father so imperial father can persuade ninth brother not to commit treason. Imperial father... I don’t want to lose another brother.’

Pei Zhang was satisfied he looked like a loving and forgiving older brother.

‘Come with me to your ninth brother’s manor!’ the emperor ordered coldly.

Pei Zhang anticipated Pei Jin’s fall and death.

The emperor didn’t care about Pei Zhang’s ulterior motives. He knew he wasn’t young anymore and if one of his sons wanted to rebel then he needed to uproot their resources before a rebellion.

The emperor commanded an army of soldiers he hid nearby the palace to

follow him to Pei Jin's manor.

Pei Zhang finally understood why his father wasn't scared of leaving the palace, his father was always secretly prepared for a rebellion.

'Seventh son, sit in my horse carriage,' the emperor said.

Pei Zhang shivered. Inside his father's horse carriage he would be defenceless, his father didn't trust him. His father was suspicious of him and wouldn't hesitate to use him as a hostage if he was part of Pei Jin's rebellion.

Pei Zhang obediently sat inside his father's horse carriage. His back stiffened, his father and his father's imperial guards sharp eyes were focused on him. The thought of Pei Jin being on the receiving end of his father's sword comforted him.

The moment Pei Zhang stepped out the horse carriage, his father's army surrounded Pei Jin's manor.

Moonlight shone on the soldiers armed with swords, bows and arrows. They stood in stances ready to attack at the emperor's command.

'Imperial father, do you want to go inside?' Pei Zhang asked.

The emperor was suspicious why Pei Jin's manor was too quiet.

'Um,' the emperor said.

After the soldier knocked thrice on the door, a young handsome servant opened the door.

The servant rubbed his eyes. 'What is it... why are you knocking on the door in the middle of the night... ah! Heavens! Why are there so many armed people?'

Afterward the lanterns in Pei Jin's manor were lit and everyone rushed outside to see what was causing the commotion.

Pei Xiao Niao's sleep was disturbed and he cried loudly.

Pei Zhang was confused why everyone at Pei Jin's manor were in their night clothes and unarmed.

Pei Jin saw his father and bowed. 'Imperial father? Imperial father, why are you here?'

The emperor wasn't pleased his careful plan was wasted by waking up unarmed people in the middle of the night. What rebellion? He was suspicious why Pei Zhang dared to deceive him!

'Imperial father, he's hiding people inside!' Pei Zhang said in a panicked tone.

Pei Zhang was determined to ensure Pei Jin wouldn't escape death that night.

The emperor's soldiers searched everywhere inside Pei Jin's manor. There were no hidden people inside Pei Jin's manor.

Pei Zhang didn't know why his father's soldiers didn't find Huang Guo's hidden men or the concealed weapons. It was impossible for Pei Jin to send the hidden men and weapons outside the manor undetected.

Pei Jin was kneeling but it was Pei Zhang who shivered fearfully.

Yan Shi Ning was kneeling next to Pei Jin and coaxing Pei Xiao Niao to sleep.

'Imperial father, what is happening?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

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End of Seventy-Six

***Related***



**Seventy-Seven**



The emperor and soldiers resented Pei Zhang's wolf cry.

'Imperial father, don't let him fool you,' Pei Zhang said. 'Imperial father, let me check inside.'

'Alright,' the emperor said coldly.

Pei Zhang led his guards inside. He checked every nook of Pei Jin's manor and didn't find anyone or anything suspicious.

'Where are they?' Pei Zhang asked. 'Where are the weapons?'

'Seventh prince, we didn't see anyone leave ninth prince's manor,' the guard said.

'Useless!' Pei Zhang said. 'How can people and weapons disappear?'

Pei Zhang knew his guards wouldn't dare deceive him. It was Pei Jin who built a trap for him!

'Imperial father, are you searching my manor because you suspect I'm hiding rebels?' Pei Jin asked sadly.

The emperor's complex eyes looked at Pei Jin.

'Ninth brother, where are you hiding your people?' Pei Zhang asked.

'Seventh brother, what people are you referring to?' Pei Jin asked confusedly.

'Assassins!' Pei Zhang said. 'Weapons! Ninth brother, don't pretend you don't know where they are!'

Pei Jin laughed coldly. 'Seventh brother, you searched everywhere and you know clearly there are no assassins and weapons here.'

Pei Zhang fisted his hands, Pei Jin turned him into a paranoid fool in front of everyone!

'Ninth brother, you framed me!' Pei Zhang said.

'Seventh brother, why would I frame you?' Pei Jin asked.

Everyone understood it was impossible for Pei Jin to frame Pei Zhang. It was Pei Zhang who requested the emperor's army to search Pei Jin's manor. Also Pei Jin cooperated without resistance and didn't hide any assassins or weapons.

‘Seventh brother, between us who is framing who?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What are you saying?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘Seventh brother, it’s not hard to see imperial father wouldn’t bring an army here unless you convinced imperial father I wanted to commit treason,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Seventh brother, tell me where am I hiding assassins and weapons?’

Pei Zhang couldn’t refute Pei Jin’s accusations.

‘Seventh brother, why did you deceive imperial father?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘Ninth brother, are you saying I deceived imperial father to frame you?’ Pei Zhang asked.

‘Seventh brother, your heart’s intentions are too deep for me to see,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Zhang wanted to vomit blood.

The emperor assessed his strong son and his weak son. He believed Pei Zhang wouldn’t deceive him because Pei Zhang wouldn’t gain anything by deceiving him. But he believed Pei Jin wasn’t a fool and wouldn’t do something reckless to frame Pei Zhang. He didn’t know between Pei Zhang and Pei Jin who was innocent.

‘Your majesty, a troop of soldiers are invading the army camp and another troop of soldiers are approaching here!’ a soldier reported.

The emperor glared daggers at Pei Zhang. He knew Pei Zhang had his guards positioned around the imperial city. Also Pei Zhang was the one who requested him to take his army here.

‘Everyone protect the emperor and kill the traitors!’ the general ordered.

‘Seventh son, confess!’ the emperor said.

‘Imperial father, I don’t know what’s happening either,’ Pei Zhang said.

‘Seventh brother, your chess manoeuvre is too deadly!’ Pei Jin said.

‘Ninth son, what are you implying?’ the emperor asked.

‘Imperial father, earlier I wondered why seventh brother would deceive you and request you to bring an army here,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Seventh brother wants to

use the strategy of making a sound in the east and striking in the west.'

Pei Jin knew he didn't need to say anymore. Pei Zhang's request to bring their father's army here was the best evidence to prove Pei Jin's innocence.

The emperor grabbed an imperial guard's sword and the sword tip pointed at Pei Zhang's throat.

Pei Zhang knelt in front of his father. 'Imperial father, I was framed!' He glared at Pei Jin. 'Ninth brother, you framed me!'

'Who framed who?' Pei Jin asked. 'Seventh brother, I considered our brotherly bond and endured your vicious slander against me and my family! On the day of imperial father's birthday banquet, you accused my wife of killing your second wife's son. But I didn't begrudge you because I believed the heavens would reward me and my family justice. But I can't let you continually frame me and my family anymore. Seventh brother, you accused me of treason. Look around you, it's your people that are attacking! How can I control your people?'

Pei Jin acted like he was deeply hurt by Pei Zhang's betrayal.

'Seventh brother, imperial father hasn't declared who he wants to give the throne to,' Pei Jin said. 'Are you scared in the future if you sit on throne, it won't be stable? Is that why you planned this?'

'Nonsense!' Pei Zhang said. 'You know imperial father wants to give the throne to me that's why you framed me! Imperial father, don't listen to his lies, he has ulterior motives-'

The emperor's sword nipped Pei Zhang's throat.

'Seventh son, how do you know I want to give you the throne?' the emperor asked suspiciously.

Pei Zhang's whole body turned cold, he realised he recklessly said too much.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Seven

***Related***



Seventy-Eight



Chapter Seventy-Eight

The emperor's army slaughtered their enemies.

The imperial guards secured Pei Jin's manor while the emperor's army fought Pei Zhang's men outside.

'Your majesty, assassins are found hidden inside seventh prince's manor,' the imperial guard reported.

The emperor slapped Pei Zhang's cheek.

'You dare to say you're innocent?' the emperor asked.

Pei Zhang didn't expect ambushing Pei Jin would lead to him being framed. He lost a chess piece, the battle and everything. All his schemes failed. He couldn't kill Pei Jin and Pei Jin's family. His father didn't trust him and he was at a disadvantage because he had no heir. Framing Pei Jin of treason was his last chess piece but it backfired and he lost pitifully.

Everyone believed Pei Zhang had planned to lure the emperor to Pei Jin's manor. Afterward Pei Zhang's men would kill the emperor, Pei Jin and Pei Jin's family. Pei Zhang would have deceived the citizens of Dian Kingdom to believe Pei Jin committed treason and killed the emperor. So the citizens and court officials would have easily accepted Pei Zhang as their ruler.

The emperor didn't want to believe Pei Zhang wanted to kill him and Pei Jin, Pei Zhang's flesh and blood. But the battle outside was enough to prove Pei Zhang's guilt.

Pei Jin appeared weak and saddened that Pei Zhang betrayed him and their father. But the truth was Pei Jin had planned to use a crucial chess piece that night long ago.

Pei Jin's plan started after Consort La's death. Consort La requested him and Yan Shi Ning to protect Pei Khan. If he wanted to protect his family and Pei Khan then he would need more guards at his manor. If he couldn't hide how strong he was anymore then it was better for him to 'accidentally' expose his real strength to Pei Zhang.

Pei Jin knew Pei Zhang's guards spied on his manor in four directions. He asked one of his guards to strike one of Pei Zhang's guards in the middle of the night so Pei Zhang's injured guard could report to Pei Zhang what happened.

Pei Jin was amused at Pei Zhang's smugness. It was amusing for a hunter to mislead a prey to think it outwitted the hunter.

Pei Jin's next step was to let Pei Zhang's guards see him sneak men and weapons into the manor so Pei Zhang would confidently report to their father in the palace. Their father had been suspicious of him long ago and he was certain their father would bring Pei Zhang to his manor to investigate. Of course he would let their father investigate and see Pei Zhang's 'treason'.

If Pei Zhang didn't use Dian Thi's son to try to kill Pei Jin's wife and son then Pei Jin wouldn't have accepted Elder Ma's offer. Of course Pei Jin wouldn't spare anyone who dared to harm his wife and son.

Elder Ma had sent Pei Jin a letter, 'the salty fishes you raised have bred. They're delicious, I'll send you five hundred salty fishes first for you to savor.'

Salty fish was the Southern Jiang's general's code name. Elder Ma sent five hundred salty fishes to Pei Jin's manor while five hundred of the Southern Jiang's general's men secretly sneaked into the imperial city. Elder Ma refused to stand idly after Elder Ma received news someone attempted to frame Pei Jin and kill Pei Jin's family. The five hundred men were a precaution to protect Pei Jin and Pei Jin's family.

Pei Jin hid Elder Ma's letter and knew five hundred men were excessive to protect him and his family. Elder Ma had intended for the five hundred men to eliminate his enemy's army.

Pei Jin's plan was disrupted by his father's plan to act like his father was dying and the edict to make him crown prince. If his son didn't remind him what was important, he would have acted recklessly and used the five hundred men to seize the throne.

Luckily Pei Jin let go of his thought to seize the throne. So he waited for his father to die and if Pei Zhang sat on the throne then he would use the five hundred men to escort him and his family safely back to Southern Jiang.

After Wang Fu Mu sent news to Pei Jin about his father's plan, Pei Jin realised he had evaded a deadly storm. His father's plan also gave Pei Jin an opportunity to make Pei Zhang suffer for harming his wife and son.



Pei Jin and the five hundred men waited for Pei Zhang to take the bait.

Pei Jin understood Pei Zhang well. Pei Zhang would have died long ago if Pei Zhang wasn't Consort Mu's son. Pei Zhang would never be as intelligent as Pei Lam. Without Consort Mu's guidance, Pei Zhang was useless. So Pei Jin wanted to lure Pei Zhang at night. Pei Zhang couldn't seek Consort Mu's guidance at night.

Pei Jin was amused how fast Pei Zhang ran to the palace to report to their father about men and weapons hidden in his manor.

While Pei Zhang's guards were running to Pei Jin's manor, the five hundred men were sent to hide in Pei Zhang's vulnerable manor.

Xiao Zai was exceptional at mimicking other people's voices. The general who ordered the emperor's soldiers to protect the emperor and kill the traitors wasn't the real general, it was Xiao Zai mimicking the general's voice. The real general was killed by one of the five hundred men long ago.

Pei Zhang's guards would want to protect their master. So it didn't matter whether Pei Zhang's army was approaching Pei Jin's manor to attack the emperor or not, the guards would attack the emperor's army to protect Pei Zhang.

Pei Jin expected the battle between Pei Zhang's men and the emperor's men. But he didn't order the five hundred men to attack. So the loud battle cries Pei Jin heard meant news of the battle was spread to Huang Guo and Huang Guo's army joined the chaos outside Pei Jin's manor.

Everyone inside Pei Jin's manor were focused on what was happening outside and lowered their guard against Pei Zhang.

Pei Zhang grabbed an imperial guard's sword, killed the imperial guard and held his father hostage.

'Seventh son, what do you want to do?' the emperor asked coldly.

'Imperial father, you forced me to do this,' Pei Zhang said. He held the sword closer to his father's throat. 'Everyone stand back!'

Pei Jin signalled for everyone not to make any sudden moves.

‘Seventh brother, let go of imperial father,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Ninth brother, I underestimated you!’ Pei Zhang said resentfully. ‘You hid your real capabilities well for many years!’

‘Seventh brother, even now you’re still stubborn,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Imperial father, you betrayed me first so you can’t blame me for betraying you,’ Pei Zhang said. ‘Imperial father, you loved tenth brother. Tenth brother is dead but you still treat me unfairly. You forced me to do this.’

Pei Zhang in his state of fury and resentment didn’t notice how close the sword was to his father’s throat.

Pei Jin saw drops of blood dripped down his father’s throat. ‘Seventh brother, let go of imperial father!’

Pei Zhang looked down at his father’s throat, he was startled to see blood and loosened his hold on the sword.

The emperor elbowed Pei Zhang’s chest while Pei Zhang was distracted and freed himself. He stabbed a sword through Pei Zhang’s stomach.

Pei Zhang didn’t know what happened. He felt pain in his stomach, vomited blood and died with his eyes wide opened.

Everyone gasped except the emperor who held a blood stained sword in his right hand.

Pei Jin’s heart farewell Pei Zhang, ‘seventh brother you finally know what happens if you oppose father.’

Suddenly Pei Jin remembered his imperial uncle’s memories of his father, ‘Xiao Jin, your imperial father was a general when he was young too. When an enemy general held him hostage, he freed himself and killed the enemy general.’

Pei Jin didn’t know how he felt about Pei Zhang’s death. If Pei Zhang truly wanted to kill their father then Pei Zhang wouldn’t have been unguarded toward their father and given their father an opportunity to kill. But if Pei Zhang wanted to convince their father to believe in their innocence then Pei Zhang shouldn’t have threatened their father. Pei Jin looked curiously at Pei Zhang’s eyes, he wondered what the last thought of people who dared to threaten their father

was.

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End of Chapter Seventy-Eight

***Related***

# Seventy-Nine



## Chapter Seventy-Nine

The emperor vomited blood.

Pei Zhang was dead. It was an unspoken understanding that Pei Jin was the unofficial crown prince.

The imperial guards escorted the emperor back to the palace.

The maids and servants cleaned Pei Jin's manor. But they were repulsed by Pei Zhang's blood.

Inside Pei Jin's chamber, Yan Shi Ning hugged Pei Jin. Her heart was overwhelmed with happiness and relief. She was happy and relieved her family survived that dangerous night.

'Pei Jin, did we win?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Yes,' Pei Jin said.

'Pei Jin, when do you think imperial father's edict will be delivered?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'He never wanted you to be crown prince. I don't think we should accept it.'

Although Pei Jin won, he didn't feel triumphant. He looked out the window and thought of the distant past. He wondered when he cared about the throne. Was it when his imperial uncle was alive? Or was it Huang Guo's continual persuasion?

Pei Jin struggled a lot in the past. He was grateful toward the people who silently helped him built his strengths. For years he hid his real self. If his father or his brothers detected his real self then between him and them the first person to die would have been him.

Even though Pei Jin's biggest rivals have fallen, he didn't know why he felt even more anxious.

The following day the court officials were surprised the emperor appeared in the imperial court after a night's ordeal.

The emperor sat arrogantly on his throne. He wanted everyone to know he was still the powerful emperor that couldn't be easily defeated.

There were many court officials missing that day. Some were killed during the night and others were locked in the palace dungeon awaiting execution.

Those court officials killed and detained were surprisingly supporters of ninth prince. The emperor replaced their positions with ordinary people.

The court officials who were spared shivered during the meeting until the emperor dismissed them.

The emperor wasn't foolish. He eliminated the biggest threats to his survival. As long as he and Pei Jin were alive, the threat of rebellion would exist unless he eliminated Pei Jin's supporters.

The court officials who escaped death and punishment walked outside the imperial court and were frightened to hear screams of torture.

'Where are the screams coming from?' the first official asked.

'Sounds like it's from the imperial physicians' chamber,' the second officials said.

'What?' the first official asked.

'It's death by a thousand cuts... the emperor hates anyone who deceives him,' the second official said.

They quickly returned to their manors to protect their heads.

Gentleman Tao was a gentleman. But he was unrecognisable after his flesh

was slowly cut to pieces. Each time a piece of flesh fell off, the eunuchs were ordered to throw salt onto his exposed muscles under his skin.

The emperor knew one of his four trusted imperial physicians had exposed his plan. His imperial guards found secret letters Gentleman Tao wrote to Consort Mu so he awarded Gentleman Tao the harshest punishment, death by a thousand cuts.

Consort Mu was fearful throughout the night. She was anxious about Pei Zhang. She wanted to send her servants to see what was happening at Pei Zhang's manor, but the emperor's imperial guards detained her in her chamber and didn't let anyone enter or leave her chamber.

In the morning Consort Mu was the last to know Pei Zhang and his men were killed for treason. She didn't know what happened but she knew Pei Zhang died because of his biggest weakness, his impatience.

Consort Mu thought about escaping. But the emperor's imperial guards dragged her into Gentleman Tao's chamber and forced her to watch Gentleman Tao being cut to death. She knew she had no hope of escaping.

The emperor watched Consort Mu silently cried after Gentleman Tao died.

'I'm rewarding you three white fabrics,' the emperor said.

The emperor glanced scornfully at Consort Mu and left the chamber.

Pei Jin and Wang Fu Mu reacted differently to Gentleman Tao's punishment, they were relieved it wasn't them in Gentleman Tao's position.

Wang Fu Mu followed the emperor outside the chamber.

'It was you!' Consort Mu accused Pei Jin.

It didn't matter if Consort Mu was intelligent, she was deceived many years by Pei Jin's weak appearance.

'Pei Jin, you're a cruel man!' Consort Mu said.

'Thank you Consort Mu,' Pei Jin said.

Consort Mu's throat felt choked.

'I'm only returning the cruelty you showed my family,' Pei Jin said. 'You killed

Consort Chen, harmed my wife and son and tried to send me into death's corner many times.'

'Is this your revenge?' Consort Mu asked.

Pei Jin didn't deny Consort Mu's accusation.

Consort Mu laughed coldly. 'You think I killed Consort Chen?'

'Who else can it be?' Pei Jin asked. 'You used Fu Gui to poison my wife, it's the same poison you used to kill Consort Chen.'

'Pei Jin, the person who killed Consort Chen wasn't me,' Consort Mu said. 'It's your imperial father.'

Pei Jin was shocked but he listened to Consort Mu's recount of what happened to Consort Chen.

'That year Huang Guo's army was becoming too powerful,' Consort Mu said. 'Huang Guo planned a rebellion after Consort Chen was pregnant. Huang Guo was behind the assassination attempts on your imperial father's life. Your imperial father survived and knew Consort Chen and her son must be killed otherwise Huang Guo would rebel if his grandson lived. Your imperial father used Fu Gui to kill Consort Mu and her son.'

Consort Mu laughed at Pei Jin's shock. 'Pei Jin, now you know who killed Consort Chen. What are you going to do to avenge her death?'

Pei Jin's whole body was cold.

'No one completely won this battle,' Consort Mu said. 'But I lost my son because your scheme is more treacherous than mine. So you win and I die. Pei Jin, you should be cautious, your imperial father hates to be deceived. If he knows you deceived him, you'll die more pitifully than us!'

Pei Jin regained his composure. 'Thank you mother for reminding me.'

Pei Jin left the chamber.

A while later the white fabrics choked Consort Mu to death.

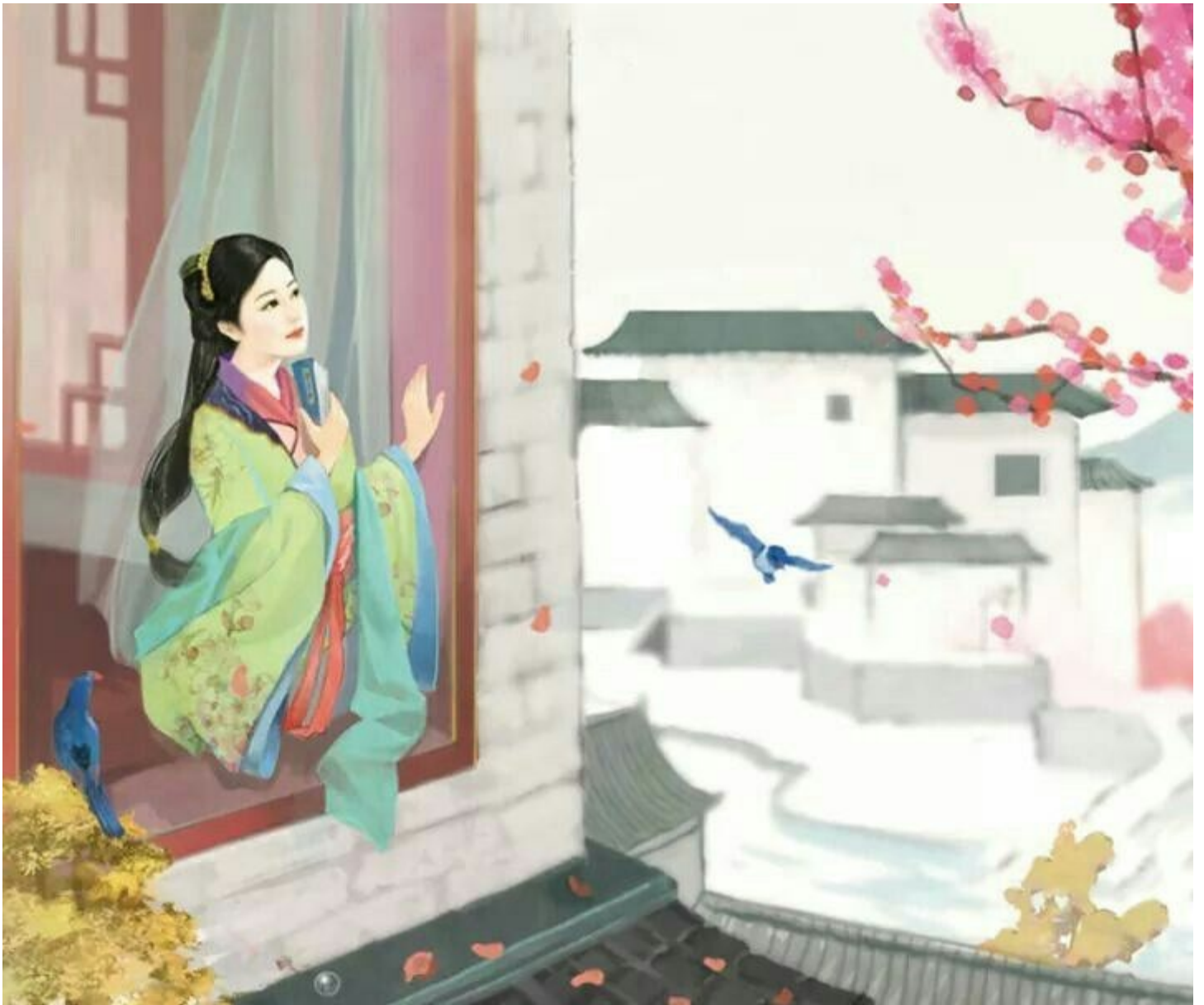
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End of Chapter Seventy-Nine

***Related***



# Eighty



## Chapter Eighty

The emperor visited the empress and the crown prince's old chambers.

The emperor didn't love the empress but he never had to worry the empress would attempt to kill him. Out of his sons, he only loved his and the empress' son. Pei Lam would never stab a sword at his throat. But the empress and Pei Lam were no longer with him. Pei Zhang's betrayal was another stab to his heart.

The emperor didn't understand why whoever he wanted to be the crown prince would die. His tenth son and seventh son were gone... only his ninth son was left who he could give the throne to before he died.

The thought of Pei Jin made the emperor reminisced about his youth. When he

was young he loved peace and quiet so he only allowed at most two palace maids to serve him.

The emperor remembered that night clearly. His young self was reading in the calligraphy room. Suddenly his body turned hot, he raised his head and saw a young palace maid was pouring tea. He stood and pushed her onto the table... after he woke up she was gone. He thought she was only a palace maid so he let that night go.

The emperor suspected he drank lust herbs and an imperial physician confirmed his suspicions.

Two months later a eunuch reported to the emperor a palace maid wanted to tell him something important... it was the palace from that night, she was pregnant. At that time he had a wife, many consorts and concubines. But only his seventh son survived. So he prepared a chamber for the palace maid during her pregnancy.

The emperor was ashamed of himself for impregnating a lowly palace maid. But he didn't hate the palace maid. She was gentle, knew her status and was caring toward other people. He thought if she gave him a son then he would consider marrying her and she would become one of his consorts. But later he found out she wasn't as gentle and kind as he thought, she had ulterior motives.

When the palace maid was four months pregnant she didn't want the emperor to spend time with his wives. She planned to feed him a weak poison so he would be bedridden while she was pregnant. Unfortunately for her, an imperial physician discovered her plan and she lost the emperor's trust.

The last five months of the palace maid's pregnancy, she behaved and didn't cause any trouble to show the emperor she was remorseful. It was a pity the emperor no longer trusted her. If she had hid her ulterior motives well then the emperor would have given her a carefree life.

The palace maid thought the emperor would forgive her after she gave birth to a prince. She didn't expect the emperor secretly killed her for deceiving him.

The emperor didn't remember what the palace maid looked like but he remembered she had gentle eyes like their son, Pei Jin. Everyone thought Pei Jin's mother died during childbirth, but he had ordered an assassin to kill Pei Jin's

mother. He would never allow someone who deceived him to stay by his side. Although he killed Pei Jin's mother, he couldn't kill Pei Jin. Pei Jin's mother had no powerful family connections so at that time Pei Jin wasn't a threat to him.

The emperor thought he could love Pei Jin. But as Pei Jin grew older, Pei Jin only became an eyesore. Each time he looked at Pei Jin it reminded him of his mother's deceit and that not everything could be within his control.

The emperor felt mentally tired thinking about Pei Jin's mother and the eyesore Pei Jin. He sat down on the empress' old bed and rested for a while. His eyes noticed words were written on a corner of the bed... 'Pei Jin killed me and the crown prince.'

The emperor recognised the calligraphy belonged to the empress. If Pei Jin was the killer then he was deceived for many years!

The court officials and everyone at Pei Jin's manor awaited the emperor's edict for many days. During those days Pei Jin attended meetings in the imperial court in the mornings and afterward he would spend time with his family at home.

Finally the emperor sent a messenger to Pei Jin's manor and requested Pei Jin to see the emperor in the imperial calligraphy room for a private meeting.

Yan Shi Ning helped Pei Jin changed clothes behind a screen.

'Pei Jin, what do you think imperial father wants to say to you?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin kissed Yan Shi Ning's lips. 'Shi Ning, you don't have to worry.'

'Go there quickly and come back quickly,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Pei Jin nodded his head and he travelled to the palace by horse carriage.

Everyone at the palace smiled at Pei Jin and they wanted to gain his favor. Pei Jin ignored them and he walked toward the imperial calligraphy room.

Pei Jin was anxious, he didn't know if his father wanted to interrogate him or promote him.

Pei Jin entered the imperial calligraphy room. His father sat on the highest chair while Pei Khan stood and looked at him cryptically.

‘Ninth brother,’ Pei Khan said.

Pei Jin didn’t expect Pei Khan would be in the imperial calligraphy room as well.

‘Thirteenth son, have you memorised the words your teacher taught you?’ the emperor asked.

‘Imperial father, I still need to improve my calligraphy,’ Pei Khan said.

Pei Khan sat and he continued practicing his calligraphy.

Pei Jin knew after their father found out Pei Khan was intelligent and could speak, their father assigned a teacher for Pei Khan. But seeing Pei Khan practicing calligraphy in the imperial calligraphy room reminded Pei Jin of the past. Their father supervised Pei Lam practicing calligraphy when Pei Lam was the same age as Pei Khan. Pei Jin wasn’t given the same treatment when he was younger, their father didn’t care about his education.

‘Ninth son, in the future I’ll leave Dian Kingdom to you,’ the emperor said.

Pei Jin didn’t expect his father would give him the throne in such a direct manner.

‘Don’t you want to?’ the emperor asked.

‘Imperial father, I fear I’m not suited for such heavy responsibilities,’ Pei Jin said.

The emperor smiled. ‘If you’re not suitable then who else is left that is suitable?’

Pei Jin’s body turned cold, he didn’t understand what his father’s words meant.

‘Ninth son, I’m not young anymore,’ the emperor said. ‘I only have a few days left... thirteenth son is still young. Ninth son, I’ll leave your thirteenth brother in yours and your wife’s care. I know both of you love your thirteenth brother.’

‘Yes, imperial father,’ Pei Jin said.

‘Thirteenth son, pour your ninth brother a cup of tea,’ the emperor said. ‘In the future you need to listen to your ninth brother.’

Pei Jin was anxious why his father acted different than usual. In the past his

father was never that gentle toward him. He wondered if his father truly let go of everything before his father died.

Pei Khan's face paled. He remembered what he overheard earlier that day.

Pei Khan was playing with the cuju ball Yan Shi Ning made for him. He accidentally kicked the cuju ball in his father's chamber. No one was allowed inside his father's chamber without permission. He looked in four directions, no one was around so he quickly entered his father's chamber to retrieve the cuju ball. Before he could leave, he heard footsteps and quickly hid under the bed. It was his father's footsteps. He waited a long time for his father to leave and felt sleepy. When he was about to sleep, he was startled by his father's words, 'Ninth son, I won't spare you!'

Pei Khan didn't understand what his father's words meant but his father's harsh tone scared him.

'Ninth son, you killed your brothers!' the emperor said. 'So I'll force your brother to kill you! You're not the only son left!'

Pei Khan was startled. He didn't know what happened and why his father wanted to kill Pei Jin.

A while later Pei Khan left his father's chamber undetected and his teacher taught him how to write more words. He couldn't sit still during the lesson. Then his father asked him to practice in the imperial calligraphy room. He couldn't memorise any of the words he learnt because he was worried about how his father intended to kill Pei Jin.

Pei Khan thought about what he overheard his father said. He suspected his father poisoned the tea in the calligraphy room and wanted him to be the person who killed Pei Jin.

Pei Khan's shaky hands held the warm cup of tea that felt too heavy. What was he supposed to do? On one side was his father and on the other side of him was his brother. He didn't want Pei Jin to die.

Pei Khan purposely walked slowly and his eyes silently warned Pei Jin not to drink the poisoned tea.

Pei Jin thought Pei Khan was acting strange. But he accepted the cup of tea

from Pei Khan and pretended to drink the tea.

Pei Jin raised his head and he was startled to see tears flowed down from Pei Khan's eyes.

The cup of tea fell out of Pei Jin's hand. There was a deadly poison inside the tea.

'It was you who killed them!' the emperor said.

Pei Jin realised his father found out about his past schemes.

'You hid your real cruel self for many years!' the emperor said. 'You killed your brothers! Did you think you can sit carefree on the throne? I should have killed you from the start!'

'Imperial father, you killed your brothers and stole the throne from your younger brother,' Pei Jin said. 'Have you ever once sat carefree on the throne in the last thirty years?'

The emperor's face whitened and he clutched his chest.

Pei Jin laughed coldly. 'Imperial father, who are you to criticize me? Isn't it true you changed imperial grandfather's edict to your name instead of imperial uncle's name? Your hands are stained with your brothers' blood too.'

'You!' the emperor said.

The emperor didn't expect Pei Jin knew the truth.

'Did you do this to avenge your imperial uncle?' the emperor asked. He gritted his teeth and remembered how Pei Jin was close to his younger brother in the past. 'Don't forget, I'm your imperial father!'

'Imperial father?' Pei Jin asked. 'I've always seen you as my imperial father. But have you ever once seen me as your son?'

Pei Jin looked coldly at the broken tea cup. 'Earlier you intended for me to die. Is this how you see me as your son?'

'You deserve to die!' the emperor said. 'You killed your tenth brother, the empress and you framed your seventh brother!'

'Did you want to kill me because you loved tenth brother?' Pei Jin asked. 'Or is

it because you hate being deceived and feeling everything is outside of your control?’

The emperor braced his hands on the table.

‘Imperial father, you’re unjust,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Why do you hate me?’

The emperor looked at Pei Jin’s eyes. Each time he looked into Pei Jin’s eyes he was reminded of the scum who deceived him. Then he would wonder if Pei Jin was like Pei Jin’s mother and scheme against him too. As Pei Jin grew older, Pei Jin acted gentle and kind like Pei Jin’s mother. The more he couldn’t see through Pei Jin the more he hated Pei Jin. Pei Jin being close to his younger brother intensified his hatred of Pei Jin.

‘I didn’t kill tenth brother,’ Pei Jin said. ‘Tenth brother faked his own death because he hated his life in the palace. I only brought him back to the imperial city and kept him captive. He was tired of living and killed himself. As for seventh brother, if he didn’t have bad intentions to kill me and my family then he would never have fallen into my trap. Imperial father, you clearly know this kind of battle can only have one winner. I only want to survive and live with my wife and son.’

‘Don’t think for a moment that I’ll believe you!’ the emperor said. ‘I’ll never believe you! Someone! Arrest him!’

Wang Fu Mu entered the room. ‘Your majesty.’

‘Where are the imperial guards?’ the emperor asked.

‘There are no imperial guards,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

The emperor saw Pei Jin stood upright and his back turned cold.

‘Wang Fu Mu, you’ve been secretly serving him!’ the emperor said.

‘Ninth prince is a good master,’ Wang Fu Mu said.

‘Do the two of you want to commit treason?’ the emperor asked.

‘Treason?’ Wang Fu Mu asked.

Wang Fu Mu was suspicious why the emperor isolated himself and didn’t let anyone come near the emperor. After he heard the emperor wanted to see Pei

Jin privately, he suspected the emperor wanted to kill Pei Jin.

Wang Fu Mu wanted to protect Pei Jin so he lied to the imperial guards the emperor wanted them to guard the palace gates. Of course the imperial guards wouldn't dare go against the emperor's orders and they believed Wang Fu Mu wouldn't dare to lie about the emperor's orders.

Pei Jin knew his father wouldn't ask all his imperial guards to guard the palace gates and leave his father vulnerable to an attack from inside the palace. Then he thought it was Wang Fu Mu's way of warning him. He didn't know how his father intended to kill him. Whether his father would stab him like he stabbed Pei Zhang or poison him like his father poisoned imperial uncle. After he entered the calligraphy room and saw the teapot he realised his father wanted to poison him.

'What is it?' the emperor asked. 'You don't dare to kill me? If you don't kill me then how will you climb onto the throne? Even if you want to be the emperor, you shouldn't dream about it!'

'Imperial father, I don't want to be the emperor,' Pei Jin said. 'I only want to be your son.'

Pei Jin knelt in front of his father, hit his forehead on the floor, stood and left the room.

The emperor watched Pei Jin's back powerlessly. He collapsed on the floor and vomited blood.

Wang Fu Mu wanted to help the emperor stand but the emperor glared at him coldly.

'Wang Fu Mu, have I mistreated you?' the emperor asked.

'Your majesty is good to me but ninth prince is good to me too,' Wang Fu Mu said.

The emperor silently stood and sat.

Pei Jin left the palace. He didn't know why his father let him leave without killing him. Inside his sleeve was a hidden poisoned dart contraption. Earlier if his father had picked up a sword when he was kneeling then he wouldn't hesitate to



release the dart.

That summer the emperor died.

Pei Jin announced the emperor’s final edict, ‘Thirteenth prince will become the emperor at the age of sixteen. Ninth prince will rule in thirteenth prince’s stead until thirteenth prince turns sixteen.’

What the citizens of the Dian Kingdom didn’t know was Pei Jin was secretly exceptional at mimicking other people’s calligraphy, especially his father’s calligraphy.

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End of Chapter Eighty

***Related***

# Eighty-One



## Chapter Eighty-One

Ten years later Pei Khan ruled the Dian Kingdom.

Pei Khan sat on the throne and looked sadly at Pei Jin who was kneeling in front of him.

‘Your majesty, let me deal with the rebellion in Southern Jiang,’ Pei Jin said.

Pei Khan’s eyes stung, he didn’t want Pei Jin and Pei Jin’s family to leave the imperial city. He understood Pei Jin trusted him to rule on his own and that two tigers couldn’t stay on one mountain.

‘Yes,’ Pei Khan said reluctantly.

Later Pei Khan and the court officials farewell Pei Jin and Pei Jin’s family. Some court officials were sad to see Pei Jin leave and some were happy to get rid of the biggest threat to Pei Khan’s rule.

Inside the horse carriage Pei Xiao Niao woke up from his nap. He rubbed his eyes and he was happy to see his imperial uncle.

‘Imperial uncle, I waited a long time to see you,’ Pei Xiao Niao said. ‘Why aren’t

you coming inside carriage?’

Pei Khan rubbed his precious nephew’s head. ‘I can’t go with you now. Xiao Niao, you go first. I’ll visit you soon.’

‘Why can’t we go together?’ Pei Xiao Niao asked.

‘Because I need to stay back to be the emperor,’ Pei Khan said.

‘Then why don’t imperial uncle not be the emperor anymore and come with me?’ Pei Xiao Niao asked.

The court officials’ faces paled.

‘That’s a good suggestion,’ Pei Khan said.

The court officials’ faces whitened.

‘But these uncles won’t agree,’ Pei Khan said.

Pei Xiao Niao looked hatefully at the court officials.

‘Imperial uncle, is it amusing being the emperor?’ Pei Xiao Niao asked.

‘Not amusing at all,’ Pei Khan said.

‘Imperial uncle, let’s share our sufferings and blessings,’ Pei Xiao Niao said sternly. ‘I’ll play in Southern Jiang for a while. Then I’ll come back to the imperial city to be the emperor and imperial uncle can go to Southern Jiang to play.’

Pei Khan’s eyes brightened. ‘Um, it’s a promise!’

The court officials wanted to vomit blood. They got rid of Pei Jin but they couldn’t stop Pei Jin’s son from returning and being the emperor.

Pei Xiao Niao waved his small hands until he couldn’t see his imperial uncle anymore and he couldn’t stop crying.

‘Mother, I can’t see imperial uncle anymore,’ Pei Xiao Niao said sadly.

Pei Wen Rui knocked her older brother’s head. ‘First brother, don’t you know how to be embarrassed? You’re too old to cry.’

Pei Xiao Niao cried louder because his little sister bullied him again.

‘Second sister, you shouldn’t bully first brother,’ Pei Wen Hui said. ‘First brother, you shouldn’t wipe your snot on second sister’s dress.’

Pei Wen Hui looked down at his older brother.

Pei Xiao Niao looked out the window and missed his imperial uncle more because his little sister and little brother joined forces to bully him. His father loved Xiao Rui and his mother loved Xiao Hui. Only his imperial uncle loved him. He cried more pitifully as the horse carriage travelled further away from the imperial city.

Pei Jin looked at his three lively children and he smiled.

‘Shi Ning, should we conceive another child?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘No!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

Yan Shi Ning thought her youngest son was good and obedient. Her oldest son and daughter were fire and water, they gave her a headache. But Pei Khan was the most behaved and helpful when Pei Khan was her children’s ages. She worried about leaving Pei Khan on his own in the imperial city.

‘Pei Jin, do you think Pei Khan can cope on his own in the imperial city?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Shi Ning, you should believe in Pei Khan’s capabilities,’ Pei Jin said.

Yan Shi Ning nodded her head. Pei Khan was the most suited to be the emperor even more suitable than Pei Jin. Pei Khan was fair, merciful, decisive and calm under pressure.

Pei Jin believed Pei Khan would be a good emperor. The last ten years were tiring for him and he was happy he finally could live a peaceful life with his family away from the palace.

‘Pei Jin, have you ever regretted giving up the throne?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Shi Ning, have you ever resented me for not giving you the opportunity for the world to admire you?’ Pei Jin asked.

‘What do you think?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

‘Wife, it appears you don’t like being admired and you hate palace protocols,’ Pei Jin said. ‘So your husband is willing to give up the world to make you happy. Besides, your husband never cared about power and money.’

‘Husband, will you die if don’t pretend to be a gentle and kind person?’ Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin smiled and kissed Yan Shi Ning.

Pei Xiao Niao turned his head away from the window and saw his parents were kissing each other again. He shook his head. ‘Father, mother, do you know how old you both are? Father, mother, don’t you both know how to control yourselves?’

Pei Wen Rui knocked her older brother’s head. ‘First brother, move your head out of the way.’

Pei Xiao Niao rubbed his sore head and cried. ‘Second sister, you hit me again.’

Pei Wen Hui ignored his noisy older brother and older sister. He silently chewed on melon seeds.

In the palace Pei Khan stood above the tallest tower where no one could see him cry while he watched the horse carriage slowly disappear.

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End of Chapter Eighty-One

***Related***

## Side Story One



### Side Story One

Yan Shi Ning loved living in Southern Jiang because the four seasons were like spring.

Yan Shi Ning felt like a free fish meeting water. Each day she didn't have to pretend to be a gentle lady. She ate, drank wine and laughed happily.

Everyone in Southern Jiang loved and respected Yan Shi Ning's husband. So Yan Shi Ning was invited to many banquets.

Pei Jin wasn't happy his wife neglected him to go to banquets and play.

Pei Jin drank wine at Elder Ma's manor to forget his wife neglected him. The past year compensated his ten years of hard work. He didn't need to scheme and battle. Anyone who saw his flushed red cheeks would have thought he was a carefree person. But his little lion had been away from home for a few days to attend a banquet, he felt neglected and lonely without her.

'Ninth prince, you don't like the musicians' performance?' Elder Ma asked. 'I'm not surprised. I've listened to them performed many times so there's a lost element of surprise.'

Pei Jin laughed. 'Elder Ma, if you didn't like listening to them then you wouldn't invite them to perform in your manor.'

'It's because I have too many silver taels,' Elder Ma said.

Elder Ma was the richest person in Southern Jiang and also the person who was robbed the most. Decades ago Elder Ma was held hostage and Prince Chen Nan rescued Elder Ma. Since that day Elder Ma saw Prince Chen Nan as his blood brother. After Elder Ma met Prince Chen Nan's beloved nephew Pei Jin, Elder Ma saw Pei Jin as his blood son.

Elder Ma would do anything for Pei Jin from loaning him an army to protect him to encouraging him to become the emperor. So after he heard the old emperor passed the throne to Pei Khan, Elder Ma cursed the old emperor for three days and three nights. Later he found out Pei Jin changed the old emperor's edict so he cursed Pei Jin instead of the old emperor. But he was happy after ten years, his beloved Pei Jin returned to Southern Jiang.

'Ninth prince, I have a treasure I want to show you,' Elder Ma said deviously.

'What else is there?' Pei Jin asked suspiciously.

'Ninth prince, this time your eyes will certainly widen,' Elder Ma said.

Elder Ma clapped his hands and the musicians played a sensual tune.

At the peak of the sensual tune, beautiful belly dancers appeared in front of Elder Ma and Pei Jin. Pei Jin's eyes widened, the way the young women were dressed would make anyone look up at the sky. The young women's white stomachs were exposed and they danced bare feet. They wore two pieces of thin undergarments and on their chests were flower tattoos.

Elder Ma grinned while he watched Pei Jin attentively watched the belly dances sway their bodies to the sensual tune. Elder Ma was pleased Pei Jin was acting like a man. Elder Ma didn't think it was natural for a man like Pei Jin to have only one wife.

Elder Ma was always dissatisfied why Pei Jin didn't want to marry young and have many wives. In the past Elder Ma even offered his daughters to Pei Jin, but Pei Jin politely declined and told Elder Ma that Pei Jin's heart was occupied. So Elder Ma cursed the nine tailed fox Yan Shi Ning for putting Pei Jin under her trance. But later Elder Ma heard about Yan Shi Ning's deeds and Elder Ma's heart softened toward her until Yan Shi Ning refused to give Pei Jin more children after Yan Shi Ning and Pei Jin's third child. Elder Ma didn't think three children were enough. Elder Ma thought Yan Shi Ning should at least give Pei Jin ten children. That was why Elder Ma encouraged Pei Jin to marry other women so they would give Pei Jin more children. But Pei Jin refused all the women Elder Ma introduced to him. That day Elder Ma thought finally after patiently waiting for many years, Elder Ma thought his efforts weren't wasted.

The banquet Yan Shi Ning attended ended and she returned home. But the maids reported to her that Pei Jin didn't stay home while she was away for a few days.

'Wen Hui, how many days has your father been away from home?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Wen Hui fed his mother melon seeds. 'Three days. Father left Xiao Zai to play with me.'

Yan Shi Ning frowned and looked at Xiao Zai. 'Where did ninth prince go?'

Xiao Hui pinched Xiao Zai. 'Mistress asked you a question.'

'Confess,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'At Elder Ma...' Xiao Zai said.

'Continue,' Yan Shi Ning said.

Xiao Zai cried. 'Ninth prince, forbid me to say.'

Yan Shi Ning smiled coldly. 'That's good he forbids you to say.'



‘Mistress, if it’s you who wants to know then I’m willing to say... but mistress can’t let ninth prince know I said anything to you otherwise-’ Xiao Zai said.

‘Confess!’ Yan Shi Ning said.

‘Elder Ma brought exotic young women dancers into Elder Ma’s manor,’ Xiao Zai said. ‘Ninth prince was mesmerized enough to forget about the sky and ground and ninth prince refused to come home.’

‘That’s good ninth prince forgot the sky and ground,’ Yan Shi Ning said coldly.

Yan Shi Ning entered Elder Ma’s manor. She saw Pei Jin was drinking wine and smiling while the half-dressed young women danced around him.

Pei Jin turned his head around and saw Yan Shi Ning was striding outside. His back stiffened, he stood and chased after her.

‘Shi Ning, Shi Ning!’ Pei Jin called.

Pei Jin realised Yan Shi Ning was seriously angry at him. He ran home. She didn’t hit or curse him, she had disappeared.

Pei Jin interrogated Xiao Hui. ‘What forgot the sky and ground? If I don’t find my wife, Xiao Zai await your punishment!’

Pei Jin searched anxiously for Yan Shi Ning around their home.

‘Xiao Hui, why did you betray me?’ Xiao Zai asked.

‘It’s your fault for hurting me last night,’ Xiao Hui said.

‘What pain?’ Xiao Zai said. ‘Don’t say it in a way that will mislead other people! Last night I only scrubbed your back! Ninth prince is going to kill me!’

Pei Jin rode a horse after the servants informed him that Yan Shi Ning was at the villa she bought.

At Yan Shi Ning’s villa she knew Pei Jin would easily find her. Since she bought the villa, the servants and maids listened to her and refused to let Pei Jin inside.

Pei Jin stood outside Yan Shi Ning’s villa and cried out until his throat was hoarse but no one opened the door for him. He realised Yan Shi Ning misunderstood him and she didn’t want to see him. He cursed Xiao Zai’s careless mouth! If Yan Shi Ning refused to see him then how could he resolve the

misunderstanding?

Yan Shi Ning was sleeping while Pei Jin was screaming outside. She was tired after playing for a few days. She dreamt she cut Pei Jin into a thousand pieces. When she dreamt about her and Xiao Tu eating dried dates, she was awoken by a noise outside the window.

Yan Shi Ning didn't hesitate to throw a pillow out the window. Only a bandit would crawl through a person's window at the hour of the tiger.

'Ah... Yan Shi Ning, do you want to kill your husband?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning leaned over the window and she saw Pei Jin fell into a bush and rubbed his sore head. The height difference between the window and the ground was higher than the height difference between her old chamber window at the Yan Manor and the ground.

Yan Shi Ning helped Pei Jin lay on the bed.

'Shi Ning, you're crueller by the day,' Pei Jin said. 'Do you hate me?'

'I didn't know it was you,' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Who else would dare crawl into your chamber in the middle of night?' Pei Jin asked. 'Shi Ning, I'm not as young as I used to be. Falling from a window at my age is painful to death. Is this your way of bullying me?'

'Pei Jin...' Yan Shi Ning said.

'Um?' Pei Jin asked.

'Who are you acting for?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'What acting?' Pei Jin asked. 'Wife, it hurts...'

Yan Shi Ning scoffed. Earlier the MF Pei Jin scared her to death but he wasn't in real pain.

Pei Jin hugged Yan Shi Ning before she could leave. 'Shi Ning, don't be angry. Let me explain.'

Yan Shi Ning knew it was useless for her to struggle and let Pei Jin hug her.

'Shi Ning, I'm innocent so don't listen to Xiao Zai's nonsense,' Pei Jin said. 'We've been married for many years. Don't you trust me?'

Yan Shi Ning ignored Pei Jin.

Pei Jin's hand wandered down Yan Shi Ning's dress. She grabbed his hand and bit hard. He retaliated and bit her neck.

'Shi Ning, you're heartless,' Pei Jin said.

'What are you going to do?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

Pei Jin smiled. 'Nothing. Shi Ning, I'm truly innocent. I know you're insecure about the scar on your chest. So I stayed at Elder's manor for a few days to learn how to tattoo from the women. If you don't believe me you can ask them. I can also show you I'm telling the truth...'

Pei Jin's erection pressed between Yan Shi Ning's thighs.

Yan Shi Ning knew Pei Jin wouldn't sleep with other women. In the last ten years in the imperial city, many women tried to get close to Pei Jin but he heartlessly pushed them away. If Pei Jin wanted to sleep with other women then he would have years ago. She only ran to her villa to punish Pei Jin a little because he exhausted her body day and night since they arrived in Southern Jiang a year ago.

'Confess, how did you enter my villa?' Yan Shi Ning asked.

'Shi Ning, do you remember how five hundred men disappeared?' Pei Jin asked.

Yan Shi Ning's eyes widened. 'What? You asked them to dig a tunnel?'

Pei Jin nodded his head. 'It's your fault for not letting me inside your villa.'

More than ten years ago Pei Jin commanded his Southern Jiang army to dig an underground tunnel to the enemy army's camp base and he threatened to ignite cannon balls if the enemy army didn't surrender. The enemy army surrendered and Pei Jin kept his strategy a secret. Later he used the same strategy against Pei Zhang. Of course five hundred men couldn't disappear. The five hundred men moved through the concealed underground tunnel to Pei Zhang's manor.

Yan Shi Ning was speechless. She couldn't believe Pei Jin truly wanted to see her enough to use the tunnel strategy for the third time.

'Wife... do you want to...' Pei Jin asked.

Pei Jin took off his and Yan Shi Ning's clothes and showed her how much he missed her.

After that night, Pei Jin failed to tattoo Yan Shi Ning's chest for many days. Each time he took off her clothes, he ate her.

Many days past and finally he tattooed a flower on Yan Shi Ning's chest.

Yan Shi Ning looked at the tattooed flower on her chest. Her eyes widened after she also saw 'Jin' was tattooed on her chest. Pei Jin explained, 'it's a way for me to recognise you in our next lives.'

'What next life?' Yan Shi Ning asked. 'You've troubled me enough in this life.'

Pei Jin and Yan Shi Ning both knew their true feelings for each other.

The autumn Pei Jin was an eighty-year-old man, he laid next to Yan Shi Ning in bed, closed his eyes and died in his sleep.

'MF Pei Jin, why didn't you wait for me?' Yan Shi Ning whispered in Pei Jin's ear, closed her eyes and died in her sleep that night too.

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## **Short Side Story Six**

Pei Xiao Niao's first birthday:

Pei Xiao Niao didn't want to stop drinking his mother's breastmilk and gave his father a headache.

Pei Jin's eyes brightened and he secretly rubbed chili powder on Yan Shi Ning's breasts.

Pei Xiao Niao suckled his mother's breast and cried pitifully.

'Xiao Niao, before you were born your mother made me suffer the same way,' Pei Jin said.

Pei Xiao Niao's second birthday:

Bei Dou and Xiao Tu's first son was born, Bei Dai Sheng.

Pei Xiao Niao was eating a chili bun. He was curious to see Bei Dai Sheng sleep inside a cot. He broke a piece of chili bun and put it in Bei Dai Sheng's mouth.

Afterward Bei Dai Sheng cried loudly and Pei Jin hit Pei Xiao Niao's bottom.

Pei Xiao Niao cried loudly. 'Father, I only wanted to let little brother Dai Sheng to taste the bun.'

Pei Xiao Niao's fourth birthday:

Pei Xiao Niao didn't want to learn to read and write.

Pei Jin was angry and threw the ink brush. 'Forget about you.'

Pei Xiao Niao ran to his imperial uncle. 'Father scolded me.'

'You deserved to be scolded,' Pei Khan said.

Pei Xiao Niao cried loudly.

Pei Xiao Niao's sixth birthday:

Pei Wen Rui was born. Pei Jin loved Pei Wen Rui because Pei Wen Rui had Yan Shi Ning's smile.

Pei Xiao Niao was unhappy his father loved Pei Wen Rui. So he drank the milk prepared for Pei Wen Rui and his father hit his bottom. He fisted his small hands and decided to rebel.

Pei Xiao Niao packed a few of his belongings and looked for Bei Dai Sheng.

'My father hits me and my mother doesn't love me, I'm running away from home,' Pei Xiao Niao said.

Bei Dai Sheng silently ate dried dates.

'I'm going to live with imperial uncle in the palace,' Pei Xiao Niao said.

Pei Xiao Niao's eighth birthday:

Pei Xiao Niao saw a beautiful jade seal on his imperial uncle's table in the imperial calligraphy room. He picked it up, played with it for a while and lost it. His imperial uncle hit his bottom because it was the imperial jade seal.

Pei Xiao Niao's tenth birthday:

Pei Xiao Niao cried all the way to Southern Jiang because he didn't want to be separated from his imperial uncle.

In Southern Jiang Pei Xiao Niao wrote many letters to his imperial uncle.

‘Imperial uncle, it’s amusing to play in Southern Jiang. Imperial uncle, should come here to play too.’

‘Imperial uncle, it’s been raining for half a month. If imperial uncle doesn’t come soon then my eyes will turn to dust.’

‘Imperial uncle, today Pei Wen Rui hit me again. Imperial uncle, come and rescue me.’

‘Imperial uncle, today is my birthday. The citizens in Southern Jiang believe if I make a wish on my birthday then my wish will come true. I wish imperial uncle is here with me.’

‘They are liars!’

Pei Xiao Niao’s fourteenth birthday:

‘Imperial uncle, Pei Wen Rui and I can’t live together under the same sky! I’m going to run away from home. Imperial uncle, I’ll see you in the palace soon.’

Pei Xiao Niao packed his belongings and ran back to the imperial city.

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End of Side Story One

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End of HBAG

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